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Representations and Oral Histories of Working Women in Post-World War Two Italy (1945-1965)

Flora Derounian

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the
requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts
in the School of Italian.

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Abstract:

This thesis studies representations and oral histories of women's work in post-World War Two Italy in films and interviews. It focuses its enquiry on three sectors: rice weeding, made-to-measure fashion, and religious work. The thesis is organised into three distinct sections on *mondine*, *sarte*, and *religiose*. Each section is divided into three parts, including a brief contextual introduction, a chapter on filmic representations, and another on oral histories. Drawing on theories of cultural and collective memory, this thesis asks how women's work is remembered and why. The goal of this research is to assess how women's work interacted with wider social and political currents between 1945 and 1965.

Dedication and Acknowledgements:

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this thesis on women and their value has been supported, inspired, critiqued, and shaped by a host of undeniably fantastic women. My first thanks is to Danielle Hipkins who encouraged me to write a proposal, and continued nourishing my interest and knowledge from afar with her own research. My own supervisors, Professor Catherine O'Rawe and Dr Ruth Glynn have my sincere gratitude for their sustained and consistent attention, insight, and encouragement.

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Thank you finally to the person who would probably prefer not to be named. Thank you for the perspective, the rigour, the escape, the adventure, the love. This thesis has you on every page, not just Chapter 1.

Author's declaration:

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: DATE:.....

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- Select the appropriate folder and video excerpt and watch online or download.

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Introduction

L'Italia è una repubblica democratica fondata sul lavoro. (Assemblea Costituente, 1946)

Work empowered and regenerated the male citizen. (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 163)

La presenza politica delle donne, ovvero il carattere politico del loro agire, non viene in genere riconosciuto come tale né dai contemporanei né dagli storici, e spesso neppure pienamente dalle stesse protagoniste.

(Rossi-Doria, 2000, p. 361)

If post-World War Two Italy was a Republic founded upon work, working women have been largely erased from this legacy. By that, I mean that the working woman has rarely been celebrated or studied for her identity as labourer or professional. This thesis redresses this absence: by looking at films and oral histories, it reveals and argues that working women are instrumentalised, sexualised, or problematised both in cultural materials and in their own recollections. It is not only cultural materials produced in the postwar period, but also contemporary scholarly enquiry which fails to remember or study women workers. In the above quote, Anna Rossi-Doria points out the erasure of women's participation in the anti-fascist Resistance, but this is symptomatic of the erasure of women's work more generally. Historian Laura Ruberto notes how work 'ordinarily performed by women [...] (paid or unpaid) is not usually discussed in labour histories' (Ruberto, 2008, p. 4). This thesis is not a labour history, although it draws upon and augments historical knowledge of women's work. Rather, this thesis provides comparative analysis of filmic representations and oral histories of working women. Its aim is to respond to a threefold shortcoming regarding working women in this period: an absence of their representation in cultural productions, an absence of their own voices, and an absence of critical scholarship. It is important to look at working women in this period because they both shaped and represented the postwar nation, and as such produced new and controversial models of femininity and nationhood.

I say that there is an absence of representations of working women because this thesis was inspired by a search for working women in films made between 1945 and 1965. Having read Stephen Gundle's chapter on 'The Rise of Professional Beauty' in his book *Bellissima* (2007, pp. 58-80), which underlines the emergence of new professional opportunities for women through beauty contests, I began to see

portrayals of such aspiring female professionals.¹ Where, then, are the other working women? If, 'although actual numbers did not rise, many women were doing more visible types of work' (Willson, 2010, p. 118), where are the cashiers, the waitresses, the secretaries, the labourers, and the teachers in films? The short answer to this question is, if anywhere, working women can be found in films' on-screen backgrounds. It is difficult to find films made in Italy between 1945 and 1965 which feature working female protagonists, and even more rare to find those where their work is a key theme of the narrative. Where they arise, filmic images of women workers 'rearticulate the social significance of female work' (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 174), and are important because they offer citizens 'an image of how they need to see themselves in order to have access to a national identity and imagine their roles in the historical process' (Vacche, 1992, p. 277). It is the frequent emphasis on other aspects of female characters' lives, such as their sexual or criminal behaviour, which leads me to argue throughout the thesis that women's work is erased, obfuscated, problematised, or diverted in narratives, and that this is symptomatic of social anxiety around the newly visible working woman.²

There is an absence of women's voices in narratives of post-World War Two Italy, because, of the few historical studies of women's work, most use archival and press materials to reconstruct the realities of women's work.³ In her investigation of the role of gender in historical labour studies, Joan Scott argues that labour historians 'now place gender (along with race) on the list of variables they acknowledge as important, but don't have time to study; class, after all, is still the issue that really counts' (Scott, 2018, p. 54).⁴ This thesis responds to the need to intersect workers' class and gender in investigations of labour. Inspired by the developing field of scholars who triangulate filmic analysis, oral history, and archival materials, the thesis asks how cultural representations compare to women's own memories of their work. Social scientists use triangulation of sources as an 'attempt to map out or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one stand point' (Cohen, et al., 2011, p. 195). Historian of women's work, Eloisa Betti, points out that triangulating written, visual, and oral sources can redress gendered absences in historical accounts.⁵ This thesis is a thin triangle; its focus on filmic representation and oral history are its long sides, underpinned by its base of contextual background informed by archival sources. It aims to study how women's work is represented and remembered, and make informed suggestions as to the reasons for this.

¹ See, for example: *Miss Italia* (Coletti, 1950), the first episode of *Siamo donne* (Guarini, 1953), and *Villa Borghese* (De Sica and Francolini, 1953).

² See Hipkins' work on prostitutes: (2006a) (2006b) (2007) (2014) (2016).

³ See, for example, Willson (2010) and Boneschi (1999), as well as the sector-specific works referenced throughout the coming chapters.

⁴ In oral history, prominent scholars have also frequently focussed on the class issues: Gianni Bosio wrote on traditional song and dance of the working classes (1996), Luisa Passerini's work studied the working classes in Turin under Fascism (1984), and Maurizio Gribaudi wrote on the Italian working classes (1987).

⁵ In her investigation of women workers in the Ducati factory in the post-World War Two period, Betti notes that 'while texts often report only male workers' involvement in the struggles, the photographs reveal the often substantial presence of women workers as well' (Betti, 2015, p. 312).

Finally, I say that there is a lack of study of women's work in post-World War Two Italy, and I will support this point in the section below on existing scholarship. In the present section, I limit myself to outlining the importance of studying women's work in reconstructing Italy's history and understanding women's existences and experiences between 1945 and 1965. Although less than a third of the active female population was officially recorded as employed in 1950, as historian Molly Tambor argues, 'the inclusion of informal labour – and prostitution – would make this percentage significantly higher' (Tambor, 2014, p. 13).⁶ Women played a key role in running the nation. Studying women's work is useful in understanding gender roles and expectations, and how these interacted with major social currents in postwar Italy like consumerism, secularisation, and modernisation. Tambor describes how postwar politicians tried to construct the ideal female figure as follows:

She would be a mother, a worker, a member of political associations and trade unions. She would be a participant in building a new democracy and reconstructing a dynamic economy and society. She would have dignity and individuality, but she would also be the moral pillar of a stable, happy family and the anchor of a productive community (Tambor, 2014, p. 4).

This description highlights a number of the contradictions which this thesis underlines: namely, women as the site for rehearsing (and often condemning) new social realities and old political wounds. Work was key to discussions of nation, as evidenced by its inclusion in Article 1, and the specific reference to 'la donna lavoratrice' in Article 31, of the 1946 Constitution. Women's work, then, occupied a particular place as symbolic of national, moral, and gender-related change. By studying how working women are represented and how they represent themselves, we can observe the revolving weather vane of Italy's social, religious, and political mores.

Women in Post-World War Two Italy

In her history of women in postwar Italian politics, Tambor observes that women 'had just been through bombings, rapes, forced labour, retaliatory strikes by occupiers, and near starvation; often they were still alone in facing the prospect of rebuilding their lives' (Tambor, 2014, p. 13). The diverse political and social contexts preceding, during, and following World War Two are important to acknowledge in order to trace and interrogate representations and oral histories of women's work in the postwar period.

⁶ 'Italy had among the absolute lowest participation rates of women in the total workforce at the time, with women only accounting for 25.3 per cent in 1940 and 26.4 in 1950' (Tomka, 2013, p. 67).

Before the war, women were subject to the contradictory rhetoric of Fascism, which Victoria De Grazia summarises as ‘a disconcerting experience of new opportunities and new repressions’ (De Grazia, 1992, p. 1). The same was true of the Fascist attitude to women in work, where it simultaneously deemed work ‘potentially dangerous’ (Willson, 2010, p. 71) and excluded women from many workplaces, while relying on their labour in areas like agriculture and service. In contrast to other post-World War One countries, Italy reacted to the population crisis by restricting women’s rights, banning abortion and contraception, and channelling women into the domestic and maternal space through repressive means. Fascism attempted to cast feminism and women’s independence as ‘spinsterish’ (De Grazia, 1992, p. 11), and yet during World War Two, the effort to confine women to the private sphere became compromised by necessity, and they flooded into munitions factories, government bureaucracies, commerce, farming, and healthcare (De Grazia, 1992, p. 7). Between 1940 and 1943, women were progressively invited into more public jobs like waitresses and tram conductors (Willson, 2010, p. 98).

As the war advanced, factors like rationing from 1940 and intensive bombing in late 1942 rendered women’s wartime experiences increasingly dire. On the other hand, in a reversal of Fascist policy, during the war ‘it was often women who dealt with the outside world’ (Willson, 2010, p. 110). Although the highest estimates of Resistance participation have suggested that up to two million women participated, many women refrained from declaring themselves as partisans after war’s end. This is the erasure to which Rossi-Doria makes reference (2000, p. 361), but it is important to acknowledge that women’s everyday experiences of the war have equally been overlooked. Recognising this crucial period of change for women, this thesis observes how wartime experiences shape women’s representations and oral histories. One example from my sources is Sister Colucci, who remembers her only teacher being killed in bombing in Foggia, marking the end of her formal education.

The immediate post-World War Two period showcases some of the reasons for which the timeframe of this thesis is so rich. On one hand, much of the misery of war continued in the form of poor supplies and living conditions, absent menfolk, and political disarray. There was also a push, particularly by the Church, back to traditional gender roles and the sanctity of the family (Tambor, 2014, p. 15). On the other hand, women’s wartime participation was key to their gaining the right to vote in the general election and referendum on the monarchy of 1946. Some historical narratives suggest that ‘Italian women emerged from World War Two with a new consciousness of their abilities as women, ready to participate in the reconstruction of their devastated country’ (Pojmann, 2013, p. 17). Certainly, women’s mass organisations like *Unione delle Donne Italiane* (UDI) and women’s branches of *Azione Cattolica* were extremely active during this period.⁷ This thesis acknowledges the historical significance of women’s suffrage, but asks how the politicisation of women translated onto the screen and into cultural and collective memory. Particularly in the light of the 1946 constitution which, in Article 31, explicitly enshrines the equal rights of the working

⁷ See Dawes (2014).

woman, with the qualification that 'le condizioni di lavoro devono consentire l'adempimento della sua essenziale funzione familiare' (Assemblea Costituente, 1946), my work explores how the tension between women as politicised, workers, and mothers plays out across sources.⁸ This thesis aims to diversify narratives and address erasures of women's wartime and postwar experiences. It builds on Stephen Gundle's (1999, p. 378), Ruth Ben-Ghiat's (2005, p. 338) and Danielle Hipkins' (2007, p. 84) arguments that in the postwar context, unlike men who were symbolic of military failure and Fascism, women were suitable figures to carry the new symbolism of the postwar Italian nation.

There was no tidal wall at the start of the 1950s against which these social currents broke. Rather, they flowed and mingled into the notional era of modernisation and reconstruction of the 1950s. Politically speaking, the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) party managed to rid itself of left-wing influence in 1947 (Mammarella, 1966, p. 147), and consequently pushed through changes which brought about the industrialisation, liberalisation, and Americanisation of Italian society. Many women supported the DC's embrace of modernisation, 'strongly shaped by American influences, [...] the liberty of the individual and of the firm, the unfettered development of technology and consumer capitalism, the free play of market forces' (Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 153-54).⁹

These political factors influenced women's lives in a number of ways. For instance, industrialisation meant many working women shifted from rural to industrial workplaces, albeit far less than men (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 236). This thesis examines how women are represented and how they identify in relation to modernisation, and whether the liberalisation of the economy affected gender norms. The immediate postwar period was also marked by international influence. The Allied occupation of Italy in 1943-45 was followed in 1947 by US Secretary of State George Marshall's European Recovery Programme (ERP), which invested greater sums in industrial, rather than agricultural, reconstruction and development (McCarthy, 2000, p. 45).¹⁰ Ginsborg argues that, as a result of these factors, 'the myth of America acquired new and even more impressive hues' in Italy (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 79). The Americanisation of Italian society and women's entry into mixed-sex workforces is generally held to have changed women's social and sexual behaviour, producing a generation of independent and promiscuous women (Ropa & Venturoli, 2010, p. 199). The veracity of this discourse has been critiqued by scholars such as Penny Morris who, in her study of the collection of agony aunt submissions *Le Italiane si confessano*, notes the 'rigidly controlled relations between the sexes in the 1950s and the atmosphere of fear and ignorance in which many women lived' (Morris, 2006a, p. 114). Yet, in the same edited volume, Lesley Caldwell suggests that 'traditional expectations that women's place in society and at work were subordinate to their position as mothers

⁸ Five of the four-hundred and forty-seven members of the *Consulta* who drew up the constitution were women (Tambor, 2014, p. 1).

⁹ 'The percentage of the Christian Democratic electorate who were female was rarely less than 60 per cent' (Pollard, 2008, p. 116).

¹⁰ 'The European Recovery Program envisaged a modest increase in farm output (15 per cent), but a 40 per cent increase in industrial output' (McCarthy, 2000, p. 45).

began to be questioned in the fifties' (Caldwell, 2006, p. 225). Willson notes that 'all this change, perhaps inevitably, also made this a period of much moral anxiety' (Willson, 2010, p. 113). This thesis traces the fluctuations and contradictions in discourses about gender norms and how they interacted with ideas of women's work.

Behind the glamour of American influence in Italy was its determination to quash national and global communism, and regarding this issue the US administration found support from the Catholic Church, which excommunicated socialists and communists in 1949 (Pojmann, 2013, p. 9). The fallout of this tension, or 'three-way tug-of-war' (Duggan, 1995, pp. 1-24), impacted on women whose participation was numerically much greater in left-wing political parties than in right-wing parties (Pojmann, 2013, p. 34). In her conference paper 'Donne e città nella guerra fredda' (26 May 2016), Betti notes that many women on the political Left continued their postwar activity and many even visited the Soviet Union. Elsewhere, women numerically dominated Catholic social action groups, Church attendance, and the DC electorate (Dawes, 2014). Wider political tensions are important to this thesis' investigation of working women. For instance, left-wing discourse is key to understanding the working identity of the *mondine*.

The impact of postwar social change on women accelerated during Italy's 'economic miracle', which is loosely ascribed to the period between 1958 and 1963. Its features of urbanisation, greater social mobility, and the mechanisation and restructuring of industry are of particular interest to this thesis. Indeed, it is the latter phenomenon that caused the decline of two of the occupations studied here, those of manual rice weeding and small-scale textile production. Legally, the early 1960s were still marked by discriminatory laws which punished women more harshly for adultery and allowed for them to be fired upon marriage.¹¹ Information on birth control and abortion was still illegal, the average woman had just under four children, and the generally falling birth rate actually rallied in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Willson, 2010, p. 126). In the home, women increasingly had dishwashers, fridges, and washing machines which transformed their domestic labour, but, it has been suggested, served to isolate them from other women and the community (Willson, 2010, p. 123). While the boom did much to modernise Italians' living conditions, it barely increased female workplace participation (Bettio, 1988, p. 48). On the other hand, many of those who were in work saw vast increases in their salaries and improved working conditions.¹² In my study of collective contracts for *sarte* in the CGIL archives in Bologna, I found that the steepest increase in minimum salaries occurred between 1960 and 1963, confirming the impact of the economic boom on women workers.¹³

¹¹ The law forbidding the firing of women workers upon marriage only came into force in 1963.

¹² As demonstrated by contracts and salary tables held at the CGIL Bologna for textiles companies between 1945 and 1965. These show the addition of insurance, an *indennità di contingenza*, and seniority bonuses to workers pay. Norms such as working hours were set; eight hours a day in 1948, and forty-eight hours a week in 1963, as well as statutory holidays (from twelve or fourteen days in 1948, to up to twenty-six days per year in 1963), and workplace canteens. Maternity regulations were included in the collective agreements from 1948, allowing women six months' leave, as well as two-thirds of their full pay for a duration of three months and six weeks (before and after birth).

¹³ See the *Tabelle salariali per sartoria su misura* between 1948 and 1963 held in the CGIL archive in Bologna.

Finally, the influence of Catholicism on women in postwar Italy is key to understanding social constraints and gender ideals for women. Historian John Pollard notes how ‘Catholicism, in various institutional forms, played a powerful, central role in the post-war reconstruction of Italy’ (Pollard, 2008, p. 109). The ideal woman envisaged by the Church at this time was first a mother, and – only if necessary – a worker. It has been noted that despite modernisation, in the matter of Catholic gender ideals there was a regression ‘verso modelli tradizionali’ (Dipartimento di Pedagogia dell’Università Cattolica di Milano, 1988, p. 278). Percy Allum describes ‘the virtue of obedience’ (Allum, 1990, p. 82) for women as one of the unchanged ideological concerns of the Church. This element fits with ‘the eventual reconstruction of a “normal” gender order’ (Tambor, 2014, p. 14), which appears to have animated Italian society in the postwar period. Where sexual liberation was concerned, female sexuality was still synonymous with moral corruption and disaster and was consequently often censored from cinema screens. This may have been a hangover from Fascism, whose accord with Catholicism on women’s social roles has already been recorded.¹⁴ For the Church, female sexuality was elided with female emancipation ‘which, it was feared, might undermine the received view of male superiority’ (Dunnett, 2002, p. 104). This thesis looks for breaks and continuities within Catholic and traditional discourse in representations and oral histories of working women.

Materials and Methodology

Materials and Sources

This thesis examines two distinct groups of sources: films and oral histories. The films are drawn from those produced in Italy between 1945 and 1965, and were selected for the primacy that they give to women’s work or working female characters. Each chapter analyses several films, spanning different dates, directors, genres, and stars, to allow for comparisons to be drawn. In order of appearance, the films are: representing *mondine*, *Riso amaro* (De Santis, 1949) and *La risaia* (Matarazzo, 1956); representing seamstresses, *Sorelle Materassi* (Poggioli, 1943), *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* (Emmer, 1952) and *Le amiche* (Antonioni, 1955); and representing women religious, *Anna* (Lattuada, 1951), *Suor Letizia* (Camerini, 1956), and *Lettere di una novizia* (Lattuada, 1960). These films were all available to Italian citizens through public cinemas and often also in *cinema parrocchiali*. Although all films recorded decent box office figures, none, apart from *Riso amaro*, could be considered either canonical or cult. This was not a motivating factor for my choice of the films but does perhaps say something about the reception of films starring women and (what are perceived as) their issues.

¹⁴ See Allum (1990, p. 82), and Pollard (2008, p. 89).

The oral histories I study are collected from various sources. In the case of the *mondine*, I study oral histories collected by three other researchers, two of whom gave me access to their raw interview material in the form of audio recordings or typed transcriptions.¹⁵ I also draw on interviews recorded in three contemporary documentary films.¹⁶ The use of other researchers' interviews, as well as the study of oral histories contained within documentaries, presents challenges and considerations which are addressed in Chapter 2. The oral histories of *sarte* in Chapter 4 and women religious in Chapter 6 were solicited, conducted, filmed, and transcribed by myself. The theoretical considerations of this process will be touched upon in this introduction, and further extrapolated in the chapters themselves. These interviews are currently stored on a secure university server; subject to interviewees' consent, they will be made publicly available on the University of Bristol Research Data Repository Facility.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

A highly interdisciplinary and mixed theoretical approach is taken in this thesis, as befits its diverse corpus. My study is broadly situated under the umbrella of cultural studies, an area which is increasingly seeing the concurrent study of films, oral histories, and social history in order to extract greater meaning from each area. An example of this is the Italian Cinema Audiences project (Treveri Gennari, et al., 2013-2016), which studies audiences' experiences of cinema-going between 1945 and 1960. Like Treveri Gennari's project, this thesis brings films and oral histories into contact, looking for crossovers and contradictions between these two groups of sources.¹⁷ The value of triangulating sources has already been discussed. Here, this approach is pioneering, as no study like it has yet been undertaken on women's work either in Italian studies or elsewhere. Like the Italian Cinema Audiences project, the societies which I examine in this thesis are both contemporary and historical. For this reason, it is suitable to take a memory studies approach, asking how the identity of working women is constructed and how this interacts with historical and contemporary social contexts. Memory studies and oral history are two related and overlapping theoretical approaches. Oral history seeks out oral sources to complement other, more traditional, material sources. Memory studies does not only address oral sources but, like oral history, it aims to understand the meaning of past events rather than trying to reconstruct their form (Perks & Thomson, 1998, p. 67). This section describes

¹⁵ The three sources of my oral histories with the *mondine* are: the oral history project conducted in 1999 by historian and UDI archivist Micaela Gavioli for her chapter in the book *Le donne, le lotte, la memoria 1949-1999 a cinquant'anni della morte di Maria Margotti* (Zagagnoni, 1999), music scholar Cristina Ghirardini's recorded group interviews with *mondine*, collected in 2009 as part of her research on two *mondine* choirs in Medicina (Bologna) and Lavezzola (Ravenna), and excerpts from some interviews with *mondine* conducted by Angela Verzelli and Paola Zappaterra for their book *La vita, il lavoro, le lotte: Le mondine di Medicina negli anni Cinquanta* (2001).

¹⁶ The documentaries are: *Il maggio delle mondine* (Marano, 2001), *Sorriso amaro* (Bellizzi, 2003), and *Di madre in figlia* (Zambelli, 2008).

¹⁷ Jo Labanyi (2007) has undertaken a similar project on cinema going and oral histories in Spain in the 1940s and 1950s. See also the seminal works on cinema and memory relating to filmic stars by Annette Kuhn (2002) and Jackie Stacey (1994).

the theoretical and methodological approaches underpinning my investigation, covering memory studies, oral history, film criticism, the sociology of work, and geographical considerations.

Memory Studies

The multifoliate and interdisciplinary nature of memory studies has created a number of critical overlaps. I am interested in the categories of cultural and collective memory, discussed by scholars of memory studies such as Pierre Nora,¹⁸ Aleida and Jan Assmann,¹⁹ Maurice Halbwachs,²⁰ and Astrid Erll.²¹ Scholars agree that cultural and collective memory can be identified in sources which show, recount, or cue memory, which are subjective, but which interact with a wider memory community and with the present. Jan Assmann describes cultural memory as a ‘body of reusable texts [and] images, [...] specific to each society in each epoch, whose “cultivation” serves to stabilize and convey society's self-image’ (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 132). In the context of this thesis, both films and oral histories manifest these characteristics of reusable texts in the cultural sphere which form and demonstrate socialised ideas of female workers.

Halbwachs has defined collective memory as ‘the organic memory of the individual, which operates within the framework of a sociocultural environment [and] [...] the creation of shared versions of the past, which results through interaction’ (Erll & Young, 2011, p. 15). Halbwachs’ insistence on the interactive nature of collective memory is immediately identifiable in the oral history and film sources I study. For example, in Chapter 1 on the *mondine* in film, interviewees meet to discuss their memories of work, later watching and commenting on the film *Riso amaro* (1949). This example perfectly manifests collective memory as ‘memories that an individual shares with his contemporaries’ (Erll & Nunning, 2010, p. 112). Similarly, collective memories are permeated with cultural materials. In Chapter 4 on seamstresses in film, interviewees identify with filmic representations of the life of Coco Chanel, affirming and approving of the truthfulness of her rags-to-riches story. These examples demonstrate the importance of approaching film and oral history as co-creations between individuals and cultural products.

Memory studies is often discussed in counterpoint with history; where history has traditionally sought to ascertain narratives of the past, memory studies is a critique of what is remembered and forgotten in narratives. However, in a contemporary context, it is more fitting to talk about the overlaps between history and memory studies. Writing in the 1980s, Nora suggests that in attempting to organise the past, history annihilates what really took place (Nora, 1989, p. 9). Nowadays, however, we should acknowledge that developments in oral history and microhistory have taken great steps to address this critique. Nora’s argument that ‘memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal

¹⁸ See Nora’s essay *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de mémoire* (1989), and his series of four volumes *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de mémoire* (1999) (2006) (2009) (2010).

¹⁹ See *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Assmann, 1992).

²⁰ See *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Halbwachs, 1925).

²¹ See *Cultural Memory Studies an International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Erll & Nunning, 2010) and *Mediation, remediation, and the dynamics of cultural memory* (Erll & Rigney, 2009).

present; history is a representation of the past' (Nora, 1989, p. 8) is key to this thesis, as it underlines the importance of a consideration of the contemporary context in order to extract meaning from sources. For example, in the case of women religious, with whom I conducted interviews in the increasingly secularised context of 2017, narratives relating to travel and education were far more frequent than mentions of spirituality or doctrine, perhaps pointing to interviewees' awareness of the unpopularity of religious discourse today. Cultural materials, like films, can also operate as sites of memory. For example, Nora chooses some literary texts as memory sites, as does Mario Insenghi in his cognate Italian work, *I luoghi della memoria* (Insenghi, 2011).

Astrid Erll's ideas on premediation and remediation are also central to my analysis of the social construction of notions of the female worker. Erll argues that:

Memorable events are usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media [...]. What is known about a[n] [...] event which has been turned into a site of memory, therefore, seems to refer not so much to what one might cautiously call the 'actual events', but instead to a canon of existent medial constructions (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 392).

Erll's contention is echoed by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, who note how, in oral history, 'historical, poetical, and legendary narratives often become inextricably mixed up' (Perks & Thomson, 1998, p. 66). These critiques strongly support the interest of studying oral histories in conjunction with films, as both are understood to interact and shape one another. Nora suggests that 'we buttress our identities upon [the] bastions' (Nora, 1989, p. 12) of cultural memories; this thesis looks at how this process functions in the case of working women in post-World War Two Italy.

Nora's assertion that we build identities through cultural and collective memory acknowledges that we do so because of the ephemerality of our own histories. A key drive of this thesis is to address the vanishing nature of sources which recount and recall women's experiences. The women who worked during World War Two are a rapidly vanishing demographic, and many of them have already died. One of the functions of this thesis is to create a corpus of sources which speak about the past and have a mnemonic function in the present. Aleida Assman describes functional memory as that which has a meaning and sense in the present (Erll & Nunning, 2010, p. 199). Where the archive is documents, maps, texts, videos etc., repertoire is the embodied enactment of memory through performance, gesture, dance, singing and so on (Taylor, 2003).²² My sources span these two categories, as stored documents and recorded embodied enactments of memory. They literally bring the past into the present.

²² Andrew Hoskins argues that contemporary archives like Youtube, span these two categories of archive and repertoire (Hoskins, 2009, p. 92). They could be described as Schrodinger's source; simultaneously stored and yet with the potential to be perpetually enacted.

It is difficult to find films made in Italy between 1945 and 1965 which feature working female protagonists, and even more rare to find those where their work is a key theme of the narrative. To give an example, in the film *La risaia* (1956) which I analyse in Chapter 1, the drama unfolds around protagonist Elena's seduction by her second cousin, her budding romance with a local mechanic, and the discovery of her biological father. Throughout, very little is said of Elena's work as a rice weeder, although her work is the very reason she finds herself in this narrative and the characteristic by which she is defined in the film's title. The films I study in this thesis were chosen because they feature working women. However, I take a holistic approach to the analysis of how women are presented, considering not only features of their work but the narratives and characteristics attributed to them more generally. This is because, taking an approach inspired by reflectionist film studies, film can function as both informer and reflection of social ideas around the working woman.²³ If, as Pierre Sorlin observes, 'cinema-going was the most popular national pastime in 1950s Italy' (Sorlin, 1996, p. 74), this thesis asks what filmic representations of working women said to, and of, postwar audiences and why.

Although there have been many studies of Italian women in film, very few connect textual analysis to approaches from new film history and cultural memory studies. I consider films as sources of cultural memory, taking them as artefacts from which we can understand postwar and contemporary Italy. Inspired by film scholar Elizabeth Cowie's assertion that 'fantasy itself is [...] a veritable *mise-en-scène* of desire' (Cowie, 1997, p. 133), this thesis will ask what social desires we can read through representations of working women. Robert Brent Toplin has observed how 'films help to shape the thinking of millions. Often the depictions seen on the screen influence the public's view of historical subjects much more than books do' (Toplin, 1996, p. vii). This thesis looks at this interaction between filmic and historical narratives of working women. More specifically, films are also useful for understanding constructions of gender; Annette Kuhn notes how films propound 'new models of femininity' (Kuhn, 2002, p. 132). The interplay of cultural representations and personal accounts is particularly poignant in the case of women's identities, since 'è proprio in questa dialettica tra il piano della realtà e quello dell'immaginario che l'immagine gioca un ruolo centrale nella produzione del genere' (Gribaldo & Zapperi, 2010, p. 21). Feature film and cultural memory can be the sites at which gendered identities are (re)negotiated.

I combine textual analysis with considerations inspired by new film history. This emerging school of study supplements narrative analysis with consideration of visual and aural elements of films. Noting the 'turn to psychoanalysis' (Chapman, et al., 2007, p. 4) of film studies in the 1970s, this thesis finds theories of the gaze particularly useful to its analysis.²⁴ New film history distinguishes itself from previous critical approaches by examining films' 'process and agency' (Chapman, et al., 2007, p. 6), studying how films are

²³ Defined by Chapman et al. (2007, p. 3) as a theoretical approach whereby critics read society through films.

²⁴ See Jacques Lacan (1981), Michel Foucault (1977), and Laura Mulvey (1975).

shaped by practical factors like economic limitations, censorship, and technology, as well as creative factors like the input of directors, stars, and crew. The value of this approach has been confirmed by scholars working in star studies.²⁵ Additionally, new film history considers films' reception, placing 'the film text at the nexus of a complex and dynamic set of relationships between producers and consumers' (Chapman, et al., 2007, p. 7). This approach complements a cultural and collective memory methodology, drawing out interactions between films and their spectators, of whom my interviewees were often a part. This approach also acts as a check on the excesses of the reflectionist model by critically assessing films' impact.²⁶ In this thesis, representations of working women are put into the context of their reception by triangulating textual analysis with reviews and publicity. I also address films' 'process and agency' by considering their directors, screen writers, and stars, and their economic and political contexts.²⁷ Finally, this thesis understands that 'films that are not watched [...] may provide the most intriguing images of the past' (Erl & Nunning, 2010, p. 395). Although none of the films studied were outright flops, films like *La risaia* (1956) were barely watched in urban areas, posing the question, if films were created 'to satisfy the desires of a mass audience' (Chapman, et al., 2007, p. 3), what can we say about those which do not?²⁸ This approach reflects my goal of analysing how multiple factors may influence and express the interactive process of films' acquisition of meaning.

Oral History

It is difficult to overstate the value of an oral history approach. At its roots, oral history aimed to enrich and diversify biased historical narratives, and in Italy it often did this by focusing on the working classes.²⁹ Historian John Foot has argued that oral history research in Italy meant that 'the "silent people", finally, were being given a voice' (Foot, 2008, p. 165), and that 'oral history has been particularly important in bringing out the personal, hidden experiences of women' (Foot, 2008, p. 170). Although this may be true to an extent, just as Foot places oral historian Luisa Passerini in brackets after Alessandro Portelli (Foot, 2008, p. 169), so too have oral historians prioritised male voices. Within feminist circles, however, Passerini and others have repeatedly emphasised 'the extraordinarily oral nature of the women's movement' (Passerini, 1992, p. 676). Internationally, feminist oral historians in the late 1960s and early 1970s took up the mantra 'giving voice to the voiceless' (Gluck, 2014, p. 35) and embraced the recording of oral sources, the reason for which was the relative absence of women from the archive.

²⁵ See, for example, Catherine O'Rawe (2010b); Richard Dyer (1998); Pauline Small (2009, p. 73); and Jackie Stacey (1994).

²⁶ For a critique of the reflectionist model, see Graeme Turner, *Film as Film* (1988, p. 129).

²⁷ As previously mentioned, my analysis of star figures is inspired by Dyer's reflections on star signification (Dyer, 1998).

²⁸ Only 5 per cent of *La risaia*'s box office takings came from urban cinemas (Spinazzola, 1974, p. 116).

²⁹ For a review of oral history studies in Italy, see Foot (2008).

Nonetheless, oral histories with working women in Italy remain relatively rare. Betti argues that this is a trend which is being increasingly addressed by scholars working on the twentieth century (Betti, 2013, p. 485).³⁰ Betti enumerates oral history projects with women as part of studies on working class movements and migration. She notes sector-specific enquiries ‘di donne lavoratrici che hanno particolarmente segnato la storia del lavoro femminile (come mondine, operaie, impiegate, lavoratrici domestiche)’ (Betti, 2013, p. 485). This thesis not only analyses oral histories addressing working women; it also contributes a new body of archival sources of women talking about their work. My choice to examine and conduct oral histories with working women is politically motivated. Oral histories are also memories and, as Jacques Derrida proposes, ‘there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory’ (Derrida, 1995, p. 4). The hope of this thesis is to – albeit in the smallest of ways – regain a measure of control of the archive, subjecting it to critique and contributing new voices to it.

Oral history is frequently used to bring out the nuances between histories of dominant and non-dominant subjects. For example, Sangster’s point that ‘managers remember history differently than workers’ (Sangster, 1994, p. 8) in her study of Canadian female textile workers, informs Chapter 4’s attention to the differing statuses of seamstresses, from directors of luxury *sartorie* to employees in small independent outfits, and how this might influence how they narrate their experiences.

One of my prime concerns in choosing an oral history methodology was to approach sources in a holistic manner, presenting not just subjects’ words, but their expressions, prosody and intonation, and body language. The importance of multimodal analysis is being increasingly recognised across disciplines.³¹ In memory studies, Nora observes how ‘true memory, [...] has taken refuge in gestures and habits’ (Nora, 1989, p. 13). Oral historian Portelli, too, laments an over-reliance on monomodal sources, saying ‘expecting the transcript to replace the tape for scientific purposes is equivalent to doing art criticism on reproductions, or literary criticism on translations’ (Portelli, 1981, p. 97). Multimodal analysis of oral histories changes and deepens our understanding of what is recounted. In his 1991 appraisal of the state of oral history studies, Dan Sipe observes that ‘the relationship between moving image and oral history, always reciprocal, holds particular promise amidst the present revolution in communications’ (Sipe, 1991, p. 75). Meanwhile, in oral history, Passerini states that ‘these days, I am convinced that visual sources are at the forefront in the struggle for innovation in history and its methodology’ (Passerini, 2011, p. 249). This thesis’ collection and analysis of filmed oral histories is a rare and progressive example in its field.³² In her article ‘A Memory for Interpreting Women’s History’ (Passerini, 1992), Passerini expresses a commitment which this thesis shares, to ‘over-turn ;[...] the traditional value of chatter, confidences, confessions and gossip [...] putting into a new context women’s previous language; the creation of new forms of expression;

³⁰ As an exception discussed in this thesis, see Maher (2007).

³¹ For example, in English linguistics, Aliyah Morgenstern notes the importance of ‘gestures, verbal productions, signs, gaze, facial expressions, and postures [...]. Human beings, with all their representational skills, combine modalities in order to share meaning’ (Morgenstern, 2014, p. 123).

³² Most oral history research uses transcriptions of audio recordings, limiting the researcher’s analytical potential.

the great importance of the body gestures, signs of emotion, facial expressions' (Passerini, 1992, p. 677). My research responds to this commitment not only by taking women's words seriously, but by recording, filming, and assessing their multimodal expression. A revealing example of this can be noted in Chapter 6 on oral histories with women religious. When discussing her decision to become a nun, Sister Pappacena remembers her choice in reaction to the death of her mother; crying, and almost in a whisper, she remembers telling herself 'devo fare la suora, devo farmi suora' (Pappacena, 2017). By assessing the vocal and gestural performance of this interview, we are able to observe how women religious narrate professional decisions with conventionally gendered expression.

Chapter 4 engages with theory on interview practice, as it is the first instance in which I present interviews conducted by myself. Here, I limit myself to pointing out Passerini's argument, that 'a life story is also a serious business, and can, if treated with due rigour, become the object of scientific enquiry' (Passerini, 1987, p. 4). I approach the 'realities' described in oral histories 'with a critical eye', as advised by Holocaust survivor and oral historian Primo Levi (Levi, 1989, p. 6). Oral history handbooks consistently alert researchers to the mutative process of the interview. The collaborative character of oral history is similarly underlined, since, 'oral history...refers [to] what the source [i.e. the narrator] and the historian [i.e. the interviewer] do together at the moment of their encounter in the interview' (Portelli, 1997, p. 3). An example of how I consider this in the thesis is the recognition that my access to convents to conduct oral histories with women religious (and interviewees' consequent production) in Chapter 6 might be primarily attributed to my perceived (female) gender.

Sociology of Work

Underpinning this thesis are theoretical reflections about the interaction between work, the individual, and society. This thesis is interested in mapping and expanding traditional definitions of work and labour. Karl Marx describes labour as 'a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature' (Marx, 1976, p. 283). Marx's insistence on the interaction of nature and worker finds echoes in my discussion of the use of female workers as symbols of land and nation, particularly in Chapter 1 on the *mondine*. The thesis also considers the distinctions that have been made between labour and work. Philosopher Hannah Arendt makes a fulsome analysis of this issue, noting the linguistic persistence of these two different terms to indicate the same activity (Arendt, 1998, p. 80). Unlike other European languages, Italian has only one verb, *lavorare*, but its various nouns *lavoro*, *mestiere*, *professione*, and *occupazione* demonstrate the nuanced meanings of what it means to 'have' work. Arendt distinguishes work as a social value which determines our worth and purpose as citizens, whereas labour encompasses the actions necessary to fulfil our needs (Arendt, 1998, p. 80). She also outlines historical notions of labour as servile, productive, unskilled, or painful. Laurie Cohen argues that career is a conception of work which workers deploy retrospectively (Cohen, 2014, p. 18), but conceiving of one's work as career is also a class-bound concept. This discussion opens up questions of

which activities can be qualified as labour and which work, and what work can be called profession, career, or occupation, a conversation with which this thesis consistently engages. The female occupations which this thesis covers span Arendt's categories of labour and work, often moving in a grey area between the two. It is interesting to see how these conceptions of work influence the way in which women are represented and discuss their occupations and identities. The blurring of women's work and labour is a debate of particular relevance to Chapter 6 and its discussion of nuns' narratives of their work as vocation.

The increasing probing of the boundaries between labour and work is evoked by Michael Hardt in his work on affective and immaterial labour.³³ Hardt understands affective labour as caring, bodily labour (Hardt, 1999, p. 96), and immaterial work as 'labour that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, knowledge, or communication' (Hardt, 1999, p. 94). Hardt underlines the gendered nature of affective and immaterial work, and how, in the West's passage from modernity to postmodernity, unproductive labour 'present[s] an enormous potential for autonomous circuits of valorisation, and perhaps for liberation' (Hardt, 1999, p. 100). This both crosses over and is at odds with Arlie Hochschild's study of emotional labour as work which is not recognised as such (Hochschild, 1983). This thesis engages with Hardt's and Hochschild's ideas about women's affective, immaterial, and emotional labour as emancipatory or oppressive.

Hardt's idea that new kinds of labour allow for emancipatory opportunities is also contrasted by Marx and Arendt, who both critique the 'theoretical glorification of labour' (Arendt, 1998, p. 4) in the modern and postmodern periods. This assertion is key to this thesis, as it provides the philosophical grounding for Paola Bonifazio's argument that work empowered male citizens in postwar Italy, and my own examination of whether this translates to the female citizen. My sources refute Passerini's argument that the lesser social value of women's work 'mak[es] it less suitable as a basis for an identity' (Passerini, 1987, p. 50). I also note Hardt's argument that labour effects 'the constitution of communities and collective subjectivities [...] produce[s] sociality, and ultimately produce[s] society itself' (Hardt, 1999, pp. 99-100). It is important to ask how women workers identify with and create collective subjectivities.

Sectors and Geographical Considerations

This thesis does not imply a homogenous Italy where working women's experiences were unaffected by their geography. The geographical scope of the films' reach is difficult to ascertain because we do not have geographical details of films' receptions. However, it is interesting to note that all of the films specify their setting and, excepting the *mondine* films, these settings are invariably urban centres like Rome, Turin, or Milan. This reinforces my argument in Chapters 3 and 4 that working women were strongly associated with the modern urban space.

³³ See, for example Hardt (1999) and (2006).

The industries this thesis examines have been largely determined by the availability of films and interviews relating to them. This thesis was first inspired by the figure of Silvana Meliga in *Riso amaro* (1949) and the realisation of the rarity of films featuring working women like her. My methodology was consequently to first find a body of coherent filmic sources on women in a given sector, and then to ascertain suitable oral history opportunities in that same sector. The second stage of this methodology was to assess how original any research into women working in these sectors would be. As I will underline, scholarly enquiry into women workers in my chosen sectors is rare, and this thesis therefore represents a highly original contribution. Additionally, the sectors I examine span very different areas of work, from agricultural to artisan and into the more ambiguous areas of religious work. This gives wide disciplinary interest and relevance to the research. For instance, an online article published in *The Conversation* on my research on *mondine* (Derounian, 2018a) drew the interest of scientists at Cornell University working on the System of Rice Intensification, underlining the originality and interdisciplinary potential of a cultural studies approach to women's work.

The oral history case studies of this thesis are, for practical and industrial reasons, focused in precise locations: the northern 'rice belt' towns of the *mondine*, Bologna and Rimini for the *sarte*, and Rome and its environs for women religious.³⁴ Despite the geographical focus of my interviews, in the case of *sarte* and particularly women religious, interviewees had come from and lived all over Italy, expanding the scope of my enquiry. Additionally, this thesis briefly acknowledges how the particular character of locations, such as the proximity to the Vatican City of my Roman religious interviewees, can actually enrich analysis by looking at how geographically-specific history and identity might have influenced representations and recollections of women's work. The geographical and sector-focused approach of this thesis means that it addresses a critical gap in scholarship on women's work, providing the opportunity to draw out parallels between industries and areas.

Existing Scholarship

Women and Work

Betti asserts that scholarly enquiry into women's work in Italy has seen a 'forte impulso' in recent decades (Betti, 2013, p. 485). While Betti makes a case for this statement in the Italian context, the same cannot be said in Anglophone literature. Canonical works on post-World War Two Italian women's history have proved to be excellent contextual sources for my study of women's work. These include *Women in Italy 1945-1965* (2006b), edited by Penelope Morris, Perry Willson's *Women in Twentieth Century Italy* (2010),

³⁴ Fully discussed in the introduction to Chapters 1 and 2, the 'rice belt' stretches across the northern regions of the Veneto, Lombardia, Emilia Romagna, and Liguria.

Wendy Pojmann's *Italian Women and International Cold War Politics 1944-1968* (2013) and Molly Tambor's *The Lost Wave: Women and Democracy in Post-War Italy* (2014). Paul Ginsborg's more general history of postwar Italy, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (1990), has also been a key point of reference. In her essay in Morris' book, Rebecca West notes how in Italian postwar domestic manuals 'the new times are acknowledged, but the overwhelming impression [...] is a world that would be much more liveable if women would simply return to their traditional roles [...] and would stop creating complications for society in their desire to work outside of the home' (West, 2006, p. 27). This quote is exemplary of the useful and interdisciplinary insights which historical works on women and Italy provide for this thesis on women's work. Francesca Bettio's study, *The Sexual Division of Labour: The Italian Case* (1988), is crucial to how I identify women working in typically 'female' sectors and the impact this had on their representation and self-image. Bettio notes that in twentieth-century Italy 'only major disruptions "external" to the labour market seemed able to break the customary resilience of sex-linked job divisions' (Bettio, 1988, p. 37), supporting my hypothesis that the strength of cultural, religious, and political discourse acted to keep women in highly-limited professional roles. Laura Ruberto's transnational study of Italian women's work in postwar Italy and America, *Gramsci, Migration and the Representation of Women's Work in Italy and the U.S.* (Ruberto, 2008), is particularly informative in its study of the *mondine* and is a key source for Chapters 1 and 2. Similarly, Rosella Ropa and Cinzia Venturi's *Donne e Lavoro, Un'identità Difficile* (2010) is useful for its geographical focus on *mondine* working in Emilia Romagna, and some more general reflections on the cultural attention given to working women in the post-World War Two period. Underpinning my analysis is evidence from these texts that can be used to assess how representations and oral histories reflect or reject dominant historical narratives. For example, in Chapter 4 on oral histories with seamstresses, one interviewee told me how her father experienced his daughter's employment and financial gain as a humiliation (Torri, 2016). Bearing in mind Tambor's argument that 'processes of "re-feminization" of women as serene managers of children, households, and budgets, and "re-masculinization" of men' (Tambor, 2014, p. 15) were fundamental to the postwar period in Italy, we see how interviewees evoke such discourse.

Scholarly literature on women's work is much ampler in the periods preceding and following 1945-65, supporting Willson's observation that the postwar period, particularly after 1950, is 'perceived [by feminist historians] as a boring gap between the excitements of the Resistance and the resurgence of second-wave feminism' (Willson, 2010, p. 118). Seminal works which discuss women's work during the Resistance include *In guerra senza armi: storie di donne 1940-1945* by Anna Bravo and Anna Maria Bruzzone (2000). Willson's own scholarship focuses on women's work under Fascism: in *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy* (1993), and *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: The Massie Rurali* (2002), she highlights Fascism's contradictory attitudes to women's work and the lasting Italian anxiety over women's extradomestic work. Victoria De Grazia includes a chapter on women's work in her book *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945* (1992). This thesis does not hesitate to draw

inspiration from historical sources studying women's work in the period preceding its scope. I use insights from these texts to assess how representations and oral histories reference and break with previous discourse on women's work. For instance, in Chapters 2 and 3 on *sarte*, I draw on De Grazia's observations about the fascist exclusion of women from some professional sectors, and their encouragement into other, more acceptably 'feminine' roles such as 'nurses, seamstresses, or social workers' (De Grazia, 1992, p. 166). This fortifies my argument that seamstresses' work after World War Two was regarded as less transgressive than female work in emerging or traditionally 'male' sectors.

There is also a greater wealth of historical studies on women in specific industrial sectors. Often, these works focus on female work simply because employment sectors themselves were so gender-divided. Bettio notes that in 1901 '89 per cent of total female labour was concentrated in 22 per cent of all listed occupational entries' (Bettio, 1988, p. 39), and that this sexual division of labour has continued into the latter half of the twentieth century. I discuss the sector-specific texts which inform my study in their relevant chapters. I limit myself here to drawing one representative example to the reader's attention. In March 2018, the publication of the article entitled 'Il lavoro (quasi) gratuito delle suore' (Kubacki, 2018) in the Vatican newspaper *L'osservatore Romano* caused a global shockwave. Journalist Marie-Lucile Kubacki used contemporary interviews with women religious to argue that their work is undervalued. Both Kubacki's methodology and argument underline the timeliness of this thesis, using women's own words to address the representation and valuation of their work.³⁵ Throughout the thesis, sector-specific enquiries like Kubacki's are drawn upon to inform and inspire my analysis.

Oral histories, Career Narratives, and Women's Work

In the Italian context, oral history studies of women's work are scarce. Luisa Passerini is a champion of oral histories with women in Italy, and her work *Torino operaia e fascismo: Una storia orale* (1984) is particularly instructive in using oral history to study subaltern subjects and work. The urgency of Passerini's argument for studying oral histories of women's work is supported by Betti who herself has produced several studies on oral histories of women's work.³⁶ Betti condemns 'the highly masculine narratives of the events put forward [...] both by historiography and collective memory' (Betti, 2015, p. 311) in the postwar period, a problem that this thesis aims to address. Vanessa Maher's book, *Tenere le fila: Sarte, Sartine, e cambiamento sociale 1860-1960* (2007), is a formative example of an oral history project that not only presents evidence from interviews, but analyses interviewees' lexical choices. Maher's examination of interviewees' descriptions of their work as 'dream' or 'passion' inspires a similar discussion in Chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis. In an Anglophone context, Sangster's investigation of the value of oral history for

³⁵ Kubacki echoes the argument of this thesis and a related article that there is a historical invisibility of women religious and their work. See my forthcoming article *The Invisible Work of Women Religious: The Italian Case* (Derounian, 2018b).

³⁶ See, for example, the essay on women in the Ducati factory in the 1950s (Betti, 2015).

recording women's participation in Canadian manufacturing supports Passerini's and Betti's convictions that 'oral history emerged from a recognition that traditional sources have often neglected the lives of women, and that oral history offered a means of integrating women into historical scholarship, even contesting the reigning definitions of social, economic and political importance that obscured women's lives' (Sangster, 1994, p. 5).

Relating to these historical oral history studies is research on women's career narratives. Laurie Cohen's work *Imagining Women's Careers* (2014) evokes key concerns about what happens to tales of women's careers as they are constructed by subjects retrospectively. Cohen emphasises how career narratives are constitutive of subjects' past and present identity, as well as reflections of historical and contemporary society (Cohen, 2014, pp. 16-17). This evaluation of women's oral histories as both historical and contemporary artefacts is one of the fundamental goals of this thesis. An example of this can be found in my analysis of the *mondine's* modern-day fame, and my contention that the current political climate is one of the reasons for their foregrounding of antifascist activity in interviews.

(Working) Women in Cinema

The quest for literature on the filmic representation of Italian working women has produced few results. Ruberto investigates cultural representations of Italian migratory female workers (Ruberto, 2008). Bonifazio looks at portrayals of work in Italian and American propaganda of the postwar reconstruction period, taking a comparative approach to representations of male and female work. Bonifazio's assertion that 'when they do enter the space of productivity, women are confined into a feminised sector' in film (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 45) ties in with the strict gender division of labour in Italy (Bettio, 1988, p. 37), but also draws our attention to *how* work is feminised. This thesis considers Bonifazio's claim that female professionals are 'either overtly sexual or stereotypically frigid' (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 49), asking what might motivate sexualised portrayals of female professionals. Mary Wood suggests that postwar film allowed women to 'explore how to combine work and family' but that these narratives were 'experienced as profoundly disorientating' (Wood, 2006, 60-61). Arguments like those of Bonifazio and Wood inspire this thesis' investigation of how semiotic strategies like focusing on women workers' bare legs, or showing scenes of workers having miscarriages, are ways in which films feminise, problematise, and other female workers.

In his investigation *Le donne, la famiglia, il lavoro nel cinema*, Carlo Carotti laments that his study 'non è stata facile [perché] i tre temi si avvicendano e si mischiano fra loro' (Carotti, 2011, p. 7). Carotti identifies a key point here; that working women are rarely allowed to be portrayed or understood predominantly as workers. It is perhaps for this reason that investigations of representations of women's work in this period are usually minor sections of studies on *auteurs* or female stars. Examples of these might include Gundle's critique of Silvana Mangano in *Riso amaro* which focuses closely on the actress' body (2007, pp. 143-147), or Calisto Tanzi's analysis of *Anna* (1951) as a forebearer of Alberto Sordi's

later foray into sex films (Cosulich, 1985, p. 52). However, narrower investigations of the films in this thesis have been useful, and are discussed in the chapters that they inform. However, even in these focused studies the only literature to look specifically at how women's work is represented is Ruberto's chapter on the *mondine* (2008), and Elisabetta Babini's article 'The Representation of Nurses in 1950s [Italian] Melodrama' (2012). My research is unique in making an analysis of portrayals of women's work in diverse sectors its central purpose.

Although not explicitly concerned with women's work, there are several film studies texts which have made a significant contribution to this thesis. The first of these is Mary Wood's book *Italian cinema* (2005). Wood includes a chapter on gender representations and gender politics, in which she outlines how, in the postwar, 'the Censorship Commission and the Catholic Church caused problems for films that projected a pessimistic view of the Italian family, and therefore women's traditional role. Female power became a sign that something was amiss' (Wood, 2005, p. 155). Wood's argument informs this thesis by indicating the role of national and religious institutions in setting gender norms, and in flagging the contentious nature of portrayals of female power.

Of equal importance is literature which discusses the significance of female star figures at this time. Richard Dyer's definition of 'star signification' (Dyer, 1998, p. 1) is deployed several times in this thesis, and is valuable in drawing out the intertextual meanings which actresses brought to their portrayals of working women. For instance, by studying Anna Magnani's star signification in the context of her role as a nun in *Suor Letizia*, and informed by Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri's chapter on women religious in film (1999), I argue that the character's eventual digression from religious to maternal is forecasted by her existing signification as mother of the Italian nation.³⁷

Similarly, the legacy of equating women with the nation in cinema has been fundamental in the development of my analysis of women workers. It was Nira Yuval-Davis who first unravelled women's national symbolism in her work *Gender and Nation* (1997). Her thesis that 'gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 39) is echoed in literature on the postwar Italian context. Gundle notes that the 'connection established in post-war cinema between the female body and the landscape was crucial insofar as it formed a basis for the "rebirth" that was so frequently invoked in the period of reconstruction' (Gundle, 2007, p. 145), and Milicent Marcus argues that there was 'a feminised conception of corporate identity which allows filmmakers to apply all the dualisms implicit in traditional portrayals of women to the plight of the postwar state' (Marcus, 2000, p. 133). Elsewhere, the instrumentalization of female characters, and specifically female working characters, to bear out notions of national war guilt through film has been criticised by

³⁷ Studies by Réka Buckley (2006) (2008) (2013), Stephen Gundle (1999) (2007), and Elisa Uffreduzzi (2017) on Italian female stars have also been useful in identifying the intertextual relevance of stars.

Danielle Hipkins (2014) (2016). This thesis builds on her critique of this process of expression of national crisis through the bodies of female characters (Hipkins, 2014, pp. 6-7).

Cinematic Context

If cinema was the biggest leisure pursuit in Italy during the period under study (Sorlin, 1996, p. 74), it is useful to note the various trends and features of postwar cinema and how they influenced representations of working women. From my research in the Cineteca di Bologna, I found twenty-one films (including those studied in this thesis) which feature female professional protagonists or mention them either in their title or listing details released between 1941 and 1965.³⁸ These films span a number of genres, directors, and release dates, begging the question, how did the cinematic context influence representations of working women?

Post-World War Two Italian cinema is perhaps best known for neorealism. This genre, with its portrayals of the supposed gritty 'realities' of the postwar nation brings a political conscience to portrayals of working women. Neorealism was decried by a number of commentators at the time, including Guido Piovene, whom Bonifazio cites as describing neorealist films as 'an exhausting confession of all our sores' (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 29). The desire to represent female workers within this canon of misery and reconstruction is discussed in Chapter 1 on *Riso amaro* (1949). Yet, as film historian Paolo Noto observes, 'quasi ogni discorso sugli anni Cinquanta è il corollario di un discorso sul neorealismo' (Noto, 2011, p. 11). This thesis aims to broaden the growing scholarship on more popular forms of film which were watched and appreciated (sometimes much more than neorealist works) by 1950s audiences.³⁹

In reaction to gloomy neorealism, in 1949 minister for entertainment Giulio Andreotti famously called for 'meno stracci, più gambe' (Franco, 2008, p. 52) in cinema, and thus hailed a new wave of cinema in the form of pink neorealism, light comedies, and melodramas, all of which used female characters and their bodies to attract audiences.⁴⁰ Bonifazio argues that the Italian state used film to 'surveil [...] desires by controlling people's social and sexual behaviours' (Bonifazio, 2011, pp. 29-30). If we consider this in the context of a desire to return to traditional gender models, it is not difficult to see why so many postwar

³⁸ This number is probably an underestimation of the number of working women in films, as many may not have featured in films' listing descriptions. The films (not including those studied in this thesis) are: *Teresa venerdì* (De Sica, 1941), *Cercasi bionda bella presenza* (Renzi, 1942), *La maestrina* (Bianchi, 1942), *Due lettere anonime* (Camerini, 1945), *Un americano in vacanza* (Zampa, 1946), *L'onorevole Angelina* (Zampa, 1947), *Fiamme sulla laguna* (Scotese, 1949), *Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi* (De Santis, 1950), *Tre storie proibite* (Genina, 1951), *I figli non si vendono* (Bonnard, 1952), *I bambini ci amano* (Della Santa, 1954), *La donna del fiume* (Soldati, 1954), and *Le ragazze di San Frediano* (Zurlini, 1955).

³⁹ See, for example: Catherine O'Rawe (2014) and (2017), Louis Bayman (2014a) and (2014b), Danielle Hipkins (2016), Natalie Fullwood (2015), Emiliano Morreale (2011) Mary Wood (2004) and (2010), and Paolo Noto (2011).

⁴⁰ For a discussion of pink neorealism, see Peter Bondanella (2001, pp. 74-102).

films struggled with the representation of female workers. Although all different in character, the thesis argues that pink neorealism, comedies, and melodramas are motivated by the desire to reassure rather than threaten the status quo, and therefore portray working women in ways that neutralise the threat they pose to social order. Wood proposes that postwar cinema 'allowed a wide variety of male and female roles, successful and unsuccessful to be rehearsed' (Wood, 2006, p. 60), the point being that films always made clear the temporary nature of women's alternative roles. This was done in portrayals of working women by marrying them off in pink neorealism, sexualising or ridiculing them in comedies, and killing or returning them to the family unit or convent in melodramas.

Again, the influence of censorship and Catholicism should be noted. Daniela Treveri Gennari has produced a comprehensive study of Vatican influence over postwar cinema (2009), and in this work she notes the tension between imported American and homegrown Italian films. Despite ideological opposition to the female models proposed by US film, the Italian film industry, 'for the sake of its own financial stability and well-being, needed to produce a popular genre cinema' (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 8). This meant that during this period, Italian films often exploit decidedly un-Catholic features, like women's sexualised bodies, whilst bringing female characters back to traditional and conservative narrative conclusions. An example of this is the protagonist of *Anna* (1951) who is shown dancing provocatively and engaging in extramarital sex, before becoming an enclosed nun. Treveri Gennari summarises the restricting grip of the Church when it came to portrayals of women, saying 'all of the female characters of the films banned by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico are to a certain extent the image of that immorality from which the Roman Catholic Church wanted to free the cinema: *working women*, prostitutes, singers and dancers' [my emphasis] (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 130). This thesis argues for a consideration of films within their cinematic context in order to fully understand the motivating factors and effects of their portrayals of working women.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is organised into three distinct sections on *mondine*, *sarte*, and *religiose*. Each section is divided into three parts, including a brief contextual introduction, a chapter on filmic representations, and another on oral histories. The first section (Chapters 1 and 2) presents the *mondine*, looking at how their representations and oral histories interact with postwar politics and notions of nationhood. This section is particularly inspired by Yuval-Davis' work on women as symbolic of nation and collectivity (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Chapter 1 analyses the films *Riso amaro* (De Santis, 1949) and *La risaia* (Matarazzo, 1956), discussing how *mondine* in film symbolise the notions of collectivity, solidarity, and antifascism and how this marries with their instrumentalization by the political Left. Chapter 2 continues this investigation, looking at how oral histories interviewees echo and internalise cinematic identities and left-wing discourse. Focusing in on

the assassination of Maria Margotti, the chapter investigates how commemoration of Margotti reflects wider trends in cultural and collective memory of the *mondine*.

The second section (Chapters 3 and 4) studies *sarte*, with particular attention to their relationship with modernity and new gender roles and spaces. These chapters draw on concepts from feminist geographers Gillian Rose (1993) and Doreen Massey (1994) to ask how space and place are fundamental expressions of gender relations. Chapters 3 and 4 look specifically at expressions of seamstresses' physical, ideological, and social spaces, and how these echoed wider social change. Chapter 3 studies the films *Sorelle Materassi* (Poggioli, 1943), *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* (Emmer, 1952), and *Le amiche* (Antonioni, 1955), looking at the interplay between national change and modernity and representations of women. Chapter 4 examines oral histories with seamstresses, exploring how life narratives can reflect both historical and contemporary attitudes towards women's work. Engaging with literature on career narratives, I argue in this chapter that *sarte* occupy a peculiar position as female professionals in a traditionally feminine occupation, and investigate how this manifests in their identity construction.

The final section (Chapters 5 and 6) addresses women religious. This section is interested in the ambiguous position of women religious as workers, assessing how they might be considered transgressive and emancipated female figures in the postwar period. Chapter 5 studies the films *Anna* (Lattuada, 1951), *Suor Letizia* (Camerini, 1956), and *Lettere di una novizia* (Lattuada, 1960), notes the boom in films portraying women religious in postwar Europe, and offers some hypotheses for why this might have occurred. Chapter 6 presents oral histories with women religious from three different Roman convents. This chapter observes how women religious recount their professional lives, blurring the boundary between religious, emotional, and professional work.

This thesis is the first to make a cross-sector analysis of women's work in the post-World War Two period by bringing filmic representations into contact with oral histories. The capacity of films and oral histories to reflect historical realities and discourse has already been elucidated, as has the neglect of literature on women as workers in this period. In critically bringing to light women's voices and experiences, and how these translated into cultural materials, the value of this research cannot be overstated. This research sheds light on how women felt about their work, how it affected their identities, and how it related to wider social change. Similarly, the thesis connects cultural products and lived experiences to show that the sea change and political evolution of women's existences went far beyond their gaining the right to vote in 1946. Operating within Italian, gender, memory, film, and oral history studies, this thesis makes an original and important contribution to the study of women's work and its cultural value.

Section 1

Mondine

The *mondine* are a thing of the past. Despite there still being 3557 *mondine* in 1958, these were the years in which the labour of Italian rice weeders was progressively replaced by the use of pesticides and mechanisation (Negrello, 2006, p. 17). Yet, though their role might have ceased to exist, the *mondine* are one of the few female workforces to have achieved and maintained visibility and renown in the public sphere. The *mondina* has become 'la figura più idealizzata, più stereotipata e più presente' (Ropa & Venturoli, 2010, p. 155) of women working in the post-World War Two period. The chapters in this section draws on Laura Ruberto's claim that 'the plight of the rice workers [...] was part of the larger national story' (Ruberto, 2003, p. 45), asking how portrayals and oral histories of *mondine* reflect wider social dynamics in postwar Italy. Chapter 1 examines the two fiction films *Riso amaro* (De Santis, 1949) and *La risaia* (Matarazzo, 1956). Chapter 2 compares filmic representations of the *mondine* in oral history interviews from research projects by Cristina Ghirardini (2012) and by Micaela Gavioli (1998-1999), and interviews from Angela Verzelli and Paola Zappaterra's book *La vita, il lavoro, le lotte: Le mondine di Medicina negli anni Cinquanta* (2001) and with the recent documentaries *Il maggio delle mondine* (Marano, 2011), *Di madre in figlia* (Zambelli, 2008), and *Sorriso amaro* (Bellizzi, 2003). These chapters ask the following questions: How are the *mondine* remembered, represented, and commemorated? What motivates their commemoration, and what does this say about the postwar and contemporary societies which do so? What challenge do portrayals and oral histories of the *mondine* pose to gender norms? The chapters examine how memory of the *mondine* interacts with, and to some extent bucks, the suppression of women's identities as workers and politically-engaged figures. In themselves, the chapters seek to address the invisibility of working women in Italian history. This introduction briefly outlines who the *mondine* were and the space they have gained in the cultural sphere.

Research on the *mondine* is important because of their contribution to women's labour history, and their unique status as commemorated female workers. While I would question Laura Ruberto's assertion that they 'have been significantly neglected in Italian history' (Ruberto, 2003, p. 4), their representation has been problematic. The *mondine* have been the subject of a considerable amount of cultural and academic enquiry, yet the nature of that enquiry has scarcely been examined.⁴¹ The *mondine* have been reported in newspapers, narrated in literature, described in public and political discourse, depicted on screen and reincarnated in modern choirs, represented in fiction films, referenced in oral testimony, and so on.⁴² *Riso*

⁴¹ See Eleonora Zappi (1991), Castelli et al. (2005), Imbergamo (2003), and Ghirardini and Venturi (2011).

⁴² Senator and doctor Giuseppe Cortese made a lengthy intervention in the senate in March 1953 on the working conditions of the *mondine*. For the full text, follow the link: <http://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/BGT/487916.pdf> [Accessed 30/06/2018]. For a full list of interventions made in the senate on the *mondine* see Imbergamo (2003).

amaro may have been the first film to fictionalise the existence of the *mondine*, but it was not the first cultural text to do so. Prior to the release of *Riso amaro*, Marchesa Colombi wrote the book *In Risaia* in 1878 about a seasonal *mondina* who went into the fields to earn a dowry for herself, and Ada Negri published a number of poems in her volume *Fatalità* (Negri, 1892), which mention the *mondine*. In the late nineteenth century, Angelo Morbelli also produced several paintings of *mondine*.⁴³ Cultural representations of *mondine* saw something of a heyday in the post-World War Two era, a popularity which continues to the present day. After *Riso amaro*, cultural production around the *mondine* exploded. *Riso amaro* was almost concurrent with several historical events which may have contributed to the *mondine*'s increasing notoriety such as the attempt on leader of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) Palmiro Togliatti's life in July 1948, and the assassination of the agricultural worker Maria Margotti in May 1949 at a peasant protest. The historical salience of *Riso amaro* is highlighted in Chapter 1. Following *Riso amaro* and these events, the *mondine* were captured in press photographs, the artist Renato Guttuso produced the publicity brochure for *Riso amaro*, and paintings showing the *mondine* at work in the fields,⁴⁴ and in 1956 Matarazzo released copy-cat film *La risaia*. The national left-wing newspaper *L'Unità* also played an important role in rendering the *mondine* visible to the public in the period following World War Two; writer Renata Viganò regularly published pieces on the *mondine*, most notable of which are her yearly commemorations of *mondina* Maria Margotti's death in *Noi donne*, as well as her book *Mondine* (1952). Ruberto notes that Italo Calvino also wrote about the *mondine* in 1950, and that most often when materials concerning the *mondine* appeared in the period between 1900 and 1965, they were funded by political or union associations (Ruberto, 2008, p. 49). Ruberto's comment reinforces the argument of these chapters that the *mondine* have been exploited for national political symbolism.

Since 1965 the *mondine* have remained part of the Italian cultural imaginary, aided by documentaries and oral history projects and musical studies such as those discussed in Chapter 2. Choirs of ex *mondine* have flourished in recent time, making appearances on national television, touring the country, collaborating with famous contemporary musicians, and even being invited overseas.⁴⁵ When I questioned her on the subject, Micaela Gavioli, archivist at the UDI Ferrara and researcher of the *mondine*, told me 'la figura della *mondina* è stata in qualche modo sfruttata da tutti [...] farcita di stereotipi e di retorica' (Gavioli, 2015). The *mondine* are, therefore, an example of rich and unusual commemoration of female labour in the postwar period. To understand *why* they may have gained this status, it is apt to study *how* they have been

⁴³ Angelo Morbelli's paintings *Per ottanta centesimi* (1895) and *In risaia* (1901) show *mondine* wearing long skirts to perform their work. The *mondine* themselves widely adopted shorts and stockings *alla Mangano* after the film's release

⁴⁴ See *Le mondine* (Guttuso, 1953). Guttuso's partner, Marta Marzotto, was a *mondina*.

⁴⁵ For example, the choir featured in the film *Di madre in figlia* (2008) collaborate with folk band Modena City Ramblers, world music ensemble Fiamma Fumana, and were invited to perform at the Festival of Colours 2007 in Detroit. Ruberto also describes another performance by a *coro delle mondine* at the Bologna Sogna music festival in 1996 (Ruberto, 2003, p. 12).

described in memory. The ambition of these chapters is to present new perspectives by interrogating recurring or prominent features of the *mondine's* cultural representation.

Existing literature on the *mondine* is helpful both to understanding their history and interrogating their commemoration. Barbara Imbergamo's work *Mondine in Campo: Dinamiche e retoriche di un lavoro del Novecento* (2003) gives an overview of the representation of the *mondine*. Other historical studies, like those by Ruberto (2003) and Eleda Gentili Zappi (1991), present fascinating historical information on the weeders' lives. It should be noted that these works have been written within the last several decades, and exemplify the recent interest in *mondine*. This increased interest is speculated on in the forthcoming chapters, and might be widely attributed to the *mondine's* status as antifascist, rural, and aesthetically appealing. I am also indebted to scholarly literature on the subject of the *mondine's* song, such as that by Ghirardini and Susanna Venturi, (2011), (2012), and Castelli et al. (2005). Studying the *mondine's* songs is beyond the scope of this thesis, although an understanding of them underpins my analysis.

Son' la mondina, son' la sfruttata

It is generally acknowledged that rice began to be cultivated in Italy in the mid-fifteenth century, and was reportedly brought to northern Italy in the form of a sack of rice gifted by the Duke of Milan to the Duke of Ferrara in 1475. Rice production was and is centred around agricultural zones in the north, including Vercelli, Novara, Milan, Pavia, and further to the East, Bologna, Reggio Emilia, Ravenna and the Veneto. These areas are called Italy's rice belt.

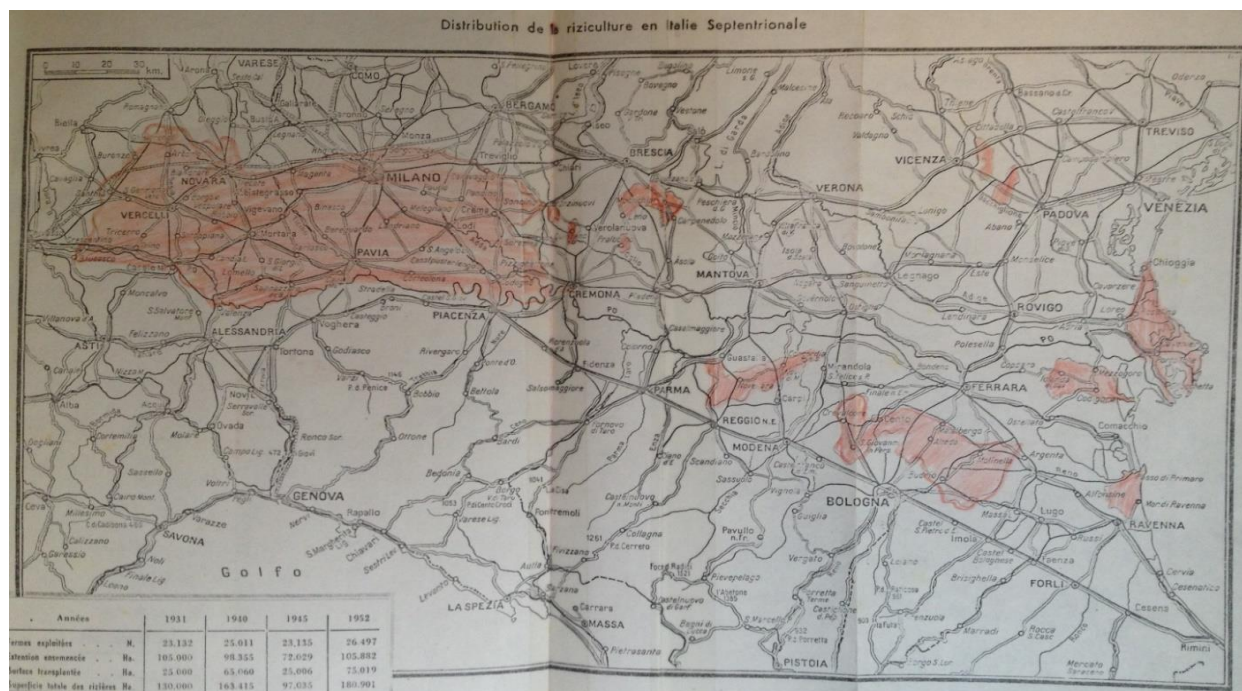


Figure 1 Italy's rice belt as demonstrated by Joelle De Lacroix (1971)

The gender division of labour in the rice fields dates from 'at least the seventeenth century' (Ruberto, 2003, p. 5). Female rice workers were referred to as *mondariso*, *mondatrici* or *mondine*. Since the latter term is currently the most popular, it is the name I elect to use in this thesis. Why were women chosen to work rice? Some say that labour in the rice fields was easier than other rural jobs (Il maggio delle mondine, 2011), while others conjecture that other, heavier agricultural tasks also had to be performed over the same *monda* period and thus male agricultural labour was unavailable. Others mention the efficacy of employing women, who were paid a fraction of men's wages (this may also explain why children were employed for the *monda*). Others still argue that women's bodies were better suited to the task, with their nimble fingers and flexible backs. There are also those who argue that the seasonal and shift nature of rice work meant that it fit well with domestic responsibilities and childcare (Zappi, 1991, p. 17).

While the first records of rice workers' protests date from the mid-nineteenth century (Zappi, 1991, p. 61), rice itself became politically charged with the dawn of Fascism, and the regime's push for *autarchia*, promoting rice as a national crop. Far from being crushed like other workers' movements, and 'political activists on the left [who] were forced underground or into exile [under Fascism there were] [...] some successful strikes carried out by women rice workers between 1927 and 1931' (Pojmann, 2013, p. 21). These chapters will focus on the *mondine* living and working after Fascism, although my analysis acknowledges and is enriched by reference to the Fascist period. The political and industrial activism of the *mondine* is a key focus of these chapters, revealing their links to the Resistance and their anti-state activity. The post-World War Two working woman was both controversial and essential, transgressive and modern; nowhere is this tension more evident than in the *mondine*. As agricultural workers, the *mondine* occupied a sector of work which was traditionally accepted – although not especially valorised – for women.

Practically speaking, the work of the *mondine* was performed in three stages: 'in maggio lo seminavano, e noi ci andavamo alla fine di giugno, in luglio, a pulirlo. Poi in ottobre si raccoglieva' (Zagatti, et al., 1998). The most intensive period for the *mondine* was the famous *quaranta giorni di monda*. This was the period between May and July in which a large – partly migratory – workforce was required to *pulire* or *disinfettare* the rice, removing the parasitic plants known in the sources I study as *erbacce* and *giavon*, and thus allowing the crop to flourish.⁴⁶ As rice cultivation expanded, the necessity for a larger seasonal workforce meant that from the early 1900s landowners began to bring in *forestieri*, who were temporary workers. These *mondine* are arguably those who have received the most attention in representations and cultural memory, most notably in fiction film. Non-local workers lived on-site in accommodation provided by landowners and were often from nearby urban centres, from families who needed the extra income to live, or occasionally, like the protagonist of Colombi's book (Colombi, 1878), for a dowry. Significantly, the *forestieri* were often drafted in when local workers went on strike for better pay and conditions. This kind of tactic in turn stoked the desire of local workers to form cooperatives and buy out private landowners.

⁴⁶ Although Zappi alleges that there are 'numerous' species of weeds that hinder rice growth (Zappi, 1991, p. 1).

These tactics undoubtedly helped in drawing distinct lines between local rice workers and *forestieri* which will be extrapolated in Chapter 2. It is perhaps unsurprising that in these chapters I investigate sources of memory mainly from women who worked in local groups of *mondine*; they are less disparate, and identify more strongly as a social and political group who not only lived together but talked, fought, and worked together. Although I agree with Ruberto's statement that we should acknowledge the 'power of migratory labour as integral to national identity' (Ruberto, 2003, p. 6), and I argue that the remarkable influxes of seasonal workers made a significant mark on the representation of *mondine*, particularly in fiction,⁴⁷ Chapter 2 focuses mainly on the oral histories of local *mondine*.⁴⁸

The *mondine* are unique among the women I study in this thesis for being a widely and consciously commemorated group. Interviewees show evidence of interacting both among themselves and with cultural materials to form their identity. This recalls the particular relevance of a memory studies methodology that considers how cultural and collective memory 'identifies a group, giving it a sense of its past and defining its aspirations for the future' (Wickham & Fentress, 1992, p. 133).

⁴⁷ De Santis was said to have been inspired to make *Riso amaro* (1947) after having come across floods of *mondine* coming back from the *quaranta giorni di monda* at Turin train station (Lizzani, 2009).

⁴⁸ The unusualness of the *forestieri* is something which has repeatedly been highlighted in major works on the *mondine*, including Ruberto (2003) and Zappi (1991). Ruberto affirms that 'rice workers do not conform to standard notions about the composition of labour groups. As seasonal migrant women working outside of the home, they are by definition an unusual group' (Ruberto, 2003, p. 6).

Chapter 1 – *Mondine* in Film

In her investigation of gender and nation Nira Yuval-Davis asserts that 'women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity's "honour" and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 67). The symbolism of women as collective, and responsible for a nation's conscience and future is the focus of this chapter on the *mondine* in film. The notion of working women as bearers of Italy's national, social, and political landscape is assessed here in the films *Riso amaro* (De Santis, 1949) and *La risaia* (Matarazzo, 1956). The question of women as representative of collectivity is particularly suited to both the time period between 1945 and 1965, and to the *mondine* as a workforce. Yuval-Davis explains women's association with nation through their direct influence over demographic production. I argue in this chapter that women are not so much symbolic of demographic production, but of the related notions of nature, collective, and body politic. Women in Italy had proven on a large scale during World War Two that they could support, shape, and renew the national labour landscape. The idea of women bearing the nation was not abstract for those living in the aftermath of the war. Stephen Gundle notes how the 'connection established in post-war cinema between the female body and the landscape was crucial insofar as it formed a basis for the "rebirth" that was so frequently invoked in the period of reconstruction' (Gundle, 2007, p. 145). Gundle argues that this was to avoid male-centered narratives which might carry overtones of Fascist nationalism. Milicent Marcus makes a similar argument, noting 'a feminized conception of [Italian] corporate identity which allows filmmakers to apply all the dualisms implicit in traditional portrayals of women to the plight of the postwar state' (Marcus, 2000, p. 330). Leslie Caldwell recognises Italy's 'extensive iconographic and cultural histories' of creating 'equivalence between women, the land and the nation' (Caldwell, 2000, p. 136). The *mondine* are these women; connected to both landscape and labour they are drawn by film into notions of nation building.

The *mondine*, arguably more than other female workforces, mirror notions of collectivity and reproduction. They worked the soil and, with their hands and bodies, turned the eternal dial of nature's cycle. Gundle notes how 'almost all the women who emerged in the early 1950s did so due to films that situated them in rural locations and disguised them as peasants or agricultural workers' (Gundle, 2007, pp. 142-43). The *mondina* character fits with the evident need for rural female characters. They were also a labour force known for collective industrial agitation and political activism, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter draws connections between Italy's social and political context and representations of the *mondine*. The chapter considers the trends and pitfalls of using women to symbolise the nation, specifically in ways which glorify their link to nature and sexuality. As Yuval-Davis notes, 'the identification of women with "nature" has been seen not only as the cause for their exclusion from the "civilised" public political domain [...] but also as the explanation of the fact that in all cultures women are less valued socially than men' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 6). This chapter assesses the impact of portraying female workers as part of nature, rather than real-world society.

Mondine were arguably the first all-female working collective to truly enter the Italian imagination through film. In the recent project Italian Cinema Audiences (Treveri Gennari, et al., 2013-2016), one participant says of *Riso amaro*, 'le mondine, non sapevamo neanche cos'erano. Abbiamo scoperto attraverso queste illustrazioni cosa voleva dire la vita di una mondina' (Barberis, 2015). Although film augmented the visibility of these particular working women in post-war Italy, the notion of 'knowing' the *mondine*, or indeed any historical subject, through film is problematic. Prolific journalist and champion of the *mondine* Renata Viganò wrote to the women themselves in 1952 that she had read 'inquadrature, [rappresentazioni] letterarie, descrizioni liriche, informazioni libresche: racconti e romanze e articoli di colore. Ma la vostra vera vita non la conoscevo' (Viganò, 1952, p. 10). Her statement highlights the cultural fabrication of notions of the *mondine* which were more reflective of fantasy than reality, interweaving cultural and collective memories. This chapter investigates the ways in which the *mondine* are portrayed in film between 1945 and 1965, and how these portrayals are politically, socially, and culturally salient.

The two films examined here, *Riso amaro* and *La risaia*, originate from different historical moments, and thus different socio-political contexts, genres, and reception contexts. This chapter first discusses the history of representation of *mondine* across cultural materials, and the importance of *Riso amaro* as a 'memory making fiction' (Erlil & Rigney, 2009, p. 395). It explores the political significance of the films, and how this links to notions of women as responsible for national rebirth. The chapter then goes on to examine how *mondine* are portrayed as workers and as women, and how these portrayals reflect the construction of womanhood as natural and sexual. In her description of the protagonist of *Riso amaro*, Giovanna Grignaffini describes Silvana as 'generosa, solidale, ladra, traditrice, tradita, amica, confidente, rivale, complice, seduttrice, sedotta, colpevole, innocente, oggetto del desiderio, vittima sacrificale ecc.' (Grignaffini, 1982, p. 44). Grignaffini's notable omission is a description of Silvana as a worker, the sole justification for her character being situated within the plot of *Riso amaro*. The intense publicity campaign preceding *Riso amaro* quite literally pasted Silvana Mangano onto Italy's landscape, and the subsequent furore around Mangano's body was thus established. When the film was exported to the US, Mangano was again foregrounded as the film's key image, and pictured alongside descriptions of 'fiery beauty' and 'Italy's Rita Hayworth'.



Figure 2 US Publicity Poster for *Riso Amaro*

This reflects a wider issue with scholarly analysis of the *mondine*; their beauty and association with the Italian landscape have been explored by Stephen Gundle (2007), their symbolic links to Fascism extrapolated by Ruth Ben-Ghiat (1999), their role as neorealist subjects investigated by Elizabeth Alsop (2014). These studies, among many others, have in common the consideration of the working woman as symbolic rather than representative. In her research on the Feminist Spirituality Movement of the 1970s, Cynthia Eller records one interviewee's observation: 'I'm trapped in the metaphor of my own physical body' (Eller, 1995, p. 137). In its final sections, this chapter demonstrates how this is also the case for *mondine*.

The Corpus

Riso amaro is a film so famous that it barely needs introduction to scholars of Italian cinema. Directed by an already-famous neorealist Giuseppe De Santis in 1948-49, and involving some of the most brilliant minds of Italian cinema at the time, *Riso amaro* was a film much larger than the sum of its parts, even before it was released.⁴⁹ The story is of protagonists Silvana (Silvana Mangano), and Francesca (Doris Dowling), two *mondine* whose fates become intertwined as they meet on the train transporting seasonal rice workers for the *quaranta giorni di monda*. Silvana is a *mondina* with a regular contract and dreams of a romantic life like those of the heroines of the *fumetti* she reads. Francesca used to be a domestic worker, until she became pregnant by her employer and ran away. She becomes a clandestine *mondina* in an attempt to escape the police who are looking for her and her lover Walter (Vittorio Gassman). Francesca and Walter are in possession of a stolen necklace, which Silvana later pilfers and wears. Once she arrives in the rice fields, Francesca collaborates with other clandestine *mondine* to obtain employment contracts. However, a fight breaks out between the *clandestine* and the *regolari* as weeding begins. Francesca successfully leads the crusade to obtain regular contracts for the clandestine *mondine*, a negotiation which is mediated by police officer Marco (Raf Vallone). Silvana is fascinated by the perceived glamour of Francesca's life, and particularly by Walter, who has followed Francesca to the rice fields. Silvana purloins the stolen necklace from Francesca, and pursues an ambiguous flirtation with Walter, until he eventually rapes her in the fields. Silvana becomes in thrall to Walter, while Francesca attempts to warn her off. Meanwhile, Marco initially attempts to court Silvana, who is uninterested. The drama reaches a climax when Walter persuades Silvana to flood the rice fields in order to distract the other workers while he steals the harvested rice. Francesca and Marco realise what is happening and give chase to Walter and Silvana, confronting them in the farm's abattoir. Inside the abattoir, Francesca explains to Silvana that she has been duped by Walter, and that the stolen necklace he has given her is a fake. Silvana turns on Walter, shooting him. Shortly after, at the *festa* marking the end of the rice harvest, Silvana commits suicide by throwing herself from one of the farm buildings just after having been voted *Miss Mondina* by her colleagues. The closing scene of the film shows *mondine* scattering a few grains of their rice-earnings on the lifeless body of Silvana. As the film ends, Francesca and Marco walk into the distance together, looking towards the future.

La risaia was released in 1956 by Raffaello Matarazzo and has largely been forgotten by audiences and critics alike. In academic study, *La risaia* is most often mentioned in enumerations of Matarazzo's oeuvres, and barely ever studied in its own right.⁵⁰ Even in instances where scholars endeavour to analyse *La risaia*, it is usually done in relation to *Riso amaro*. This is because *La risaia* is widely regarded as 'a clear

⁴⁹ As well as De Santis, *Riso amaro* brought together screenwriters like Carlo Lizzani and Gianni Puccini. Award-winning author and journalist Corrado Alvaro also contributed to the script, as did prolific screenwriter Ivo Perilli (who also wrote on Lattuada's 1951 film *Anna*, analysed in Chapter 5). Carlo Musso worked as a writer on the script of *Riso amaro*, as well as on *La risaia*.

⁵⁰ Morreale studies *La risaia* as a melodrama (2011), as does Bisoni (2015). Uffreduzzi makes a comparison between dance in *La risaia* and *Riso amaro*, among other films (2017).

retracing of *Riso amaro* [...] reworking every one of its ingredients for guaranteed success' (Uffreduzzi, 2017, p. 74), in a way which was ultimately underwhelming because of the differing socio-historical moment of its release. The plot of *La risaia* sees Elena (Elsa Martinelli) leave her urban home to work in the rice fields. Little does she know that the owner of the rice fields, Pietro (Folco Lulli) is her estranged biological father. Pietro realises Elena is his illegitimate daughter upon seeing her, and after a few enquiries into her background he goes to visit her mother, who confirms his suspicions. Meanwhile, Elena catches the eye of Pietro's playboy nephew, Mario, who attempts to seduce her by driving her into the remote countryside. Elena escapes his clutches, and runs into Gianni (Rik Battaglia), a local mechanic who agrees to drive her home. Gianni and Elena begin courting, but Pietro's interest in Elena arouses Gianni's suspicions, and he eventually accuses her of having a relationship with Pietro. The couple break up, and at the party marking the end of the *quaranta giorni di monda*, Elena decides to drown her sorrows. Mario seizes the opportunity and again attempts to rape Elena. Just in time, Gianni hears her cries for help and breaks into the barn where the two are struggling. A fight ensues, and ends only when Gianni accidentally kills Mario. Pietro arrives on the scene and decides to hand himself in as the guilty party in order to grant Gianni and Elena the freedom to marry and live happily together. The film ends with Pietro being driven off by the police while Elena looks on at the man she has just learnt is her father.

Political Significance of the Films: Context, Genre, Reception

Both *Riso amaro* and *La risaia* fit within the concepts of cultural and collective memory. While they form a 'body of reusable texts, images, and rituals [...] whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey society's self-image' (Assman & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 132), they also create 'shared versions of the past, which result through interaction, communication, media, and institutions within small social groups as well as large cultural communities' (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 15).⁵¹ Inspired by new film history (Chapman, et al., 2007), and new cinema history (Maltby, et al., 2011) this chapter deems it important to acknowledge how the films' historical contexts, their genres, and receptions affect how, and to what extent, their representations of working women entered collective memory and popular imaginary.

One of the reasons *Riso amaro* has received such great attention is due to the wider political, national, and historical dynamics with which it engaged. Carlo Lizzani, who co-wrote *Riso amaro*, acknowledges the links between the socio-historical context of 1949 and the film, which exhibited 'tutti i momenti di inquietudine, di ripiegamento individualistico e di scivolamento in senso già consumistico e

⁵¹ Halbwachs' emphasis on interaction in collective memory between individual and group is immediately identifiable with the fiction films, since we know that real *mondine* were used as extras in *Riso amaro*, and that they informed their on-screen interpretation (and representation). For example, in the documentary *Sorriso amaro* (2003) several of the ex *mondine* recount their experience as extras in the filming of *Riso amaro*.

neocapitalistico che si sarebbero manifestati' (Lizzani, 2009, p. 87). In his book, Lizzani mentions American influence through the Marshall Plan, the attempt on Togliatti's life and the election of the Christian Democrats in 1948 as historical features which influenced both the film and its reception.⁵² The film was produced as Antonio Gramsci's *Quaderni dal carcere* began to be published and widely read, another fact which intensified interest in left-wing cultural activity.

The film was also topical in terms of labour history; the late 1940s and early 1950s saw the beginnings of protective labour legislation in Italy, but were dubbed by the working classes *gli anni duri*. Paul Ginsborg has eloquently detailed the deleterious effect of the push for industrialisation and neoliberalism on workers (Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 186-187). Lizzani acknowledges the role the labour context played in *Riso amaro*, stating, 'avevamo affrontato di petto il conflitto sociale, questo serpeggiava in tutto il racconto. [...] Rivelava l'incidenza che lo sfruttamento intenso della mondina (orari di lavoro, cottimi) provoca all'interno della stessa massa delle lavoratrici avvelenandone i rapporti' (Lizzani, 2009, p. 35). There has been some suggestion that *Riso amaro* also put 'i problemi del lavoro e le tematiche sociali al centro del cinema' (Morreale, 2011, p. 264). Carlo Lizzani similarly said of Mangano that 'diventò un simbolo di un'Italia diversa, un'Italia in cui la donna aveva una presenza nel lavoro, non solo nei salotti del Vecchio cinema' (Sorriso amaro, 2009). I would be critical of both of these statements. Although labour conditions are addressed in *Riso amaro*, the specificity of women's work itself is glossed over. Rather than discussing women's employment rights directly, the film is more interested in women's symbolic value than their lived experiences.

Ben-Ghiat argues that *Riso amaro* engages with the post-World War Two context by externalising responsibility for Fascism (Ben-Ghiat, 1999, pp. 94-97). She asserts that, through Silvana and Walter, Italian Fascists are portrayed as helpless victims of an evil regime who should be pardoned. Ben-Ghiat's analysis again shows the tense historical context in which *Riso amaro* was produced, a context which almost inevitably produced politically-charged cinematic portrayals. The interaction of *Riso amaro* and the historical events preceding it supports the idea that this film used female working characters to reproduce discourse about nationhood.

Where *Riso amaro*'s immediate post-World War Two context poises it at a moment of profound national change, *La risaia* was made in 1956 in a more stable political atmosphere. Emiliano Morreale says of *La risaia*, that 'viene eliminata ogni ipotesi di indagine sociale' (Morreale, 2011, p. 276), a reading which I would contradict. What is remarkable about the two films' political significance, is that although both present class struggle, only *Riso amaro* is remembered as a political film. Why is this? *La risaia*, like *Riso amaro*, is a tale of a subaltern heroine who works for her own liberation and that of her colleagues. As honest workers, she and Gianni are oppressed by members of a dominant class (Mario and Pietro), but

⁵² De Santis himself has decried the 'corruzione che, con mezzi apparentemente innocenti, una certa ideologia americana ha diffuso in Europa Occidentale' (Farassino, 1978, pp. 24-25).

resist them and finally gain emancipation.⁵³ What makes this tale less incisive is its lack of novelty or relevance to its socio-historical context. Marcus describes the mid-late 1950s as characterised by ‘ideological complacency’ (Marcus, 2000, p. 339). The potential for a popular revolution and the political sensitivity of capitalism and foreign influence had somewhat passed out of popular discourse by 1956 (Mammarella, 1966, p. 291). There was a stable Christian Democrat government in power, and Italy was moving towards the individualist and consumerist dynamic of the boom years. Matarazzo’s film sidestepped some of the historically-powerful social critique inscribed in *Riso amaro*; for example, Elisa Uffreduzzi observes that the American culture and sexual licentiousness in *Riso amaro* is watered down in *La risaia*. Such a move rendered the film less politically sensitive by ‘eschewing [...] the lascivious American costumes opposed by both the DC and the PCI’ (Uffreduzzi, 2017, p. 75). Perhaps contrary to his intentions, Matarazzo’s political crowd-pleasing may have been the reason the film failed to enter collective or cultural memory in the same way as its predecessor. However, Matarazzo’s altogether more peaceable *mondine* are no less reflective of ideas about nationhood than De Santis’; it is simply a more peaceable nation that they are reflecting.

Another way in which *Riso amaro* was politically charged was in its genre. De Santis had established links with neorealism. In an interview in 1960 with *La table ronde*, he declared the aim of neorealism to be to ‘redeem our guilt [by] taking a hard look at ourselves and telling ourselves the truth’ (Ben-Ghiat, 1999, p. 84). Truth is evidently a goal of *Riso amaro*, which in its opening sequence imitates documentary or newsreel footage. This supposed truthfulness was controversial because it manifested in often gloomy portrayals of the nation, which elicited ‘telegrammi e missive con le quali si ingiungeva di non far circolare all’estero quel cinema italiano che mostrava solo stracci e miserie’ (Lizzani, 2009, p. 89). We must ask ourselves whether the ‘truthfulness’ of neorealism extended to its portrayals of working women, and if not, why not? Elizabeth Alsop has argued of *Riso amaro* that ‘postwar cultural production in Italy can readily be seen to have served fantasmatic and even mythopoetic ends’ (Alsop, 2014, p. 28). This chapter argues that *Riso amaro*’s portrayals of women’s work play into these mythopoetic ends. In a seemingly oxymoronic move, *Riso amaro* also straddled the genre of melodrama, presenting exaggeration and excessive emotion in contrast to the supposed reality of neorealism. Rice workers lent themselves to these two contrasting genres; they were a politically-active subaltern workforce ripe for bearing the symbolism of post-war Italy, yet they were also women, and thus connected to melodrama and romance.⁵⁴ However, both these choices of genre come at the cost of realism in portrayals of women’s work.

Neorealism, which had been a critical rather than popular success had, by 1956, been overtaken by

⁵³ There is no equivalent of *Riso amaro*’s Silvana in *La risaia*, and her materialist, individualist, Americanophile tendencies. Her character is probably best equated to the supporting characters in *La risaia* of the shallow and frivolous *mondine* who admire Mario for his sportscar and attempt to spend all his money in a *gelateria* when he abandons them. The critique of these attitudes undoubtedly loses some of its bite in *La risaia*.

⁵⁴ That melodrama was a female genre – in the sense that it had a female address and was female centred – has been repeated by many scholars like Bayman (2014b), Cardone (2012, p. 9), and Morreale (2011).

more light and appealing models that Giulio Andreotti would have approved of (Franco, 2008, p. 52).⁵⁵ *La risaia* was the contemporary of light comedies by Dino Risi and Mario Monicelli, and light-hearted narratives by Luciano Emmer. Both *Riso amaro* and *La risaia* exhibit melodramatic features like heightened emotion, ill-fated romance, and corrupting sexual desire. *La risaia*, however, with its colour and Cinemascope (Bisoni, 2015, p. 239) production, was 'un film amfibio' (Morreale, 2011, p. 275).⁵⁶ As Morreale observes, *La risaia* swings between an ambition for realism, and Matarazzo's roots in melodrama, somewhat glossing over the gritty 'realites' which *Riso amaro* represented. These issues of genre demonstrate the subtle difference between *Riso amaro* and *La risaia*, and why the latter found less political significance because of its lack of social critique. Despite *La risaia*'s audience-grabbing full-colour aesthetic, Matarazzo's melodramas - of which he was the grand master - had begun to seem increasingly outmoded to audiences of the late 1950s. As Uffreduzzi observes, 'in *La risaia*, the mechanisms aimed at arousing spectators' emotions [...] are transparent and a bit old-fashioned with respect to an increasingly mature film audience' (Uffreduzzi, 2017, p. 64). Critics extended their scorn of Matarazzo's chosen genre by saying of the film, 'cambiano i mezzi di ripresa e di proiezione, ma un film a fumetti di Raffaello Matarazzo sarà sempre un film a fumetti di Raffaello Matarazzo' (Anon., 1957). This critique reflects a general scorn for traditionally female cultural materials like *fumetti* in a male-dominated critical context. Again, the dissonance of genre and critical and popular tastes at the time of *La risaia*'s production may account for the underwhelming nature of its reception.

The historical context and genre of *Riso amaro* set the stage for it to become a 'memory making fiction' (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 395), whereas *La risaia* continues to be deemed an outmoded remaking of the former. The reason for this, it could be posited, is that 'what is needed is a certain kind of *context*, in which [...] films are prepared and received as memory-shaping media' (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 295). *Riso amaro* enjoyed the influence of a network of 'media representations [which] prepares the ground for memory films, leads reception along certain paths, opens up and channels public discussion' (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 138). One such representation was the publicity poster of Silvana Mangano standing in shorts in a rice field, which was put up all over Italy before the release of the film. Consequently, and unlike *La risaia*, we could argue that *Riso amaro* has come to be what Pierre Nora describes as a *lieu de mémoire*, a 'significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community' (Nora & Kritzman, 1996, p. XVII). Matarazzo, although significantly more prolific than De Santis, was accused by critics of creating *neorealismo d'appendice*.⁵⁷ Critics of *La risaia* used terms like 'una brutta copia', 'racconto d'appendice' (Casadio, 1990, p. 111), and 'un calco, in chiave melodrammatica' (Spinazzola, 1974, p. 119) when

⁵⁵ Christopher Wagstaff (2007) explains the contradictions between critical and popular receptions of neorealism, and the issue of counting immediate box office takings and later viewings.

⁵⁶ Cinemascope technology became available in 1953 and allowed filming for widescreen movies. This technological choice may account for why *La risaia* features so many panning shots of the women working in the rice fields. These shots would undoubtedly have shown off the widescreen filming to its best advantage.

⁵⁷ Matarazzo directed forty-two films in his lifetime (of which *La risaia* was the thirty-sixth) as opposed to De Santis' eleven.

comparing it to *Riso amaro*. Contemporary scholars dismiss *La risaia* as 'a re-working of *Riso amaro*' (Buckley, 2006, p. 329).

In a more general sense too, the films' box office takings attest to their varying impact on cultural memory. *Riso amaro* recorded 385 million Lire at the box office (Chiti & Pioppi, 1991, p. 310), and was one of 1949's biggest box office earners. Particularly abroad, *Riso amaro* 'risulta tra i campioni d'incasso' (Michelone, 2009, p. 26), with American audiences preferring it to other Italian neorealist works like Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (1948). Perhaps most striking is the longevity of *Riso amaro*'s popular reception. In the 1990s the film was named among the '100 migliori film di tutto il tempo' by Radiocorriere TV (Michelone, 2009, p. 27). The film also impacted upon successive behaviours of *mondine* and media alike; one critic observes that *Riso amaro*, 'si impose con la forza delle sue immagini al punto da modificare sia il modo di "rappresentare" le mondine – da allora in poi sempre ritratte con le gambe evidenziate dai corti calzoncini "alla Mangano" – sia l'atteggiamento di queste ultime' (Lucia Motti in Imbergamo, 2014, 155).

Elsewhere, *Riso amaro* was received negatively by the political Left in the period directly following its release. The main objection was to De Santis' use of American-style pin-ups, eliciting the response that 'le gambe nude di Silvana non potevano istruire gli operai' (Vitti, 2011, p. 57). Exception was also taken to the '[un]realistic picture of the world of the rice weeders' (Gundle, 2007, p. 146). For similar reasons, both *Riso amaro* and *La risaia* were received negatively by the Catholic church, which strongly advised audiences against the former, and deemed the latter only suitable for 'adulti di piena maturità morale' (Centro Cattolico Cinematografico, 1956, p. 117).

La risaia's box-office takings were 477 million lire. However, it took most of its revenues outside of *prima visione* cinemas (Spinazzola, 1974, p. 116).⁵⁸ It was also only a provincial success (with only 5 per cent of its takings coming from urban centres), again suggesting that Matarazzo was neither aiming for, nor obtaining, a film of cutting-edge social or intellectual critique (Spinazzola, 1974, p. 116). *La risaia*'s greater box office takings may also suggest a gap between public consumption and critical reception. Its success in *cinema di seconda o terza visione* suggests that it lacked the hype of *Riso amaro*, and was a film which was *eventually seen*, rather than a must-see. There is markedly less literature on *La risaia* in comparison to *Riso amaro*, which in itself points to a lack of critical interest. However, we should recall Erll's remark that films which are not watched are valuable sources through which to study cultural memory (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 138). In the context of this chapter, we might conclude that *La risaia* represented working women in a way which was less remarkable in its historical context, its genre, and its reception.

⁵⁸ We should also consider strong inflation between 1949 and 1956 which meant that higher takings in Lire did not necessarily translate to greater viewing figures.

Working (Class) Women

Work is strongly gendered in these films, never allowing the viewer to forget that these workers are, first and foremost, women. As I have already observed, Grignaffini's list of adjectives to represent Silvana of *Riso amaro* both genders Silvana, casting her into traditional relational definitions of seduced and victim, and overlooks her main role as a worker. In the introduction to *Riso amaro*, viewers are told of the *monda*: 'è un lavoro duro e immutabile [...] eppure, soltanto le donne possono compierlo. Occorrono mani delicate e veloci. Le stesse mani che infilano l'ago e curano i neonati'. This headline information given to viewers recalls Bonifazio's statement that representations of women's work only portray 'the type of work [which] required "female skills": "dita agili e leggere, gusto della rifinitura, della decorazione"' (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 173). Never is the viewer allowed to forget the biological gender of the female worker, whether in the focus on their bodies (discussed below), or in the miscarriages or sexual violence which occur as the women labour. Gundle notes that Italian film stars were adored overseas because they were 'representatives of a lifestyle that rested on clearly-defined gender roles' (Gundle, 2007, p. 142). Women are 'carriers of tradition' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 61), and the explicit feminizing of the *mondine*'s work means that it carries reassuring symbolic links to nation and tradition.

One of the meanings which the *mondine* symbolise is that of left-wing, working class struggle. In *Riso amaro*, the introductory voiceover provided by the character of the presenter of Radio Torino enumerates the kind of women who come to perform the *monda*, beginning with 'contadini [and] operaie'. Factory workers and peasants particularly were known for left-wing affiliation. As the camera pans through the crowds of *mondine* swarming the station, we see male FIAT workers holding placards which declare 'auguri alle mondine. FIAT, grandi motori', and 'arrivederci per quaranta giorni. FIAT Lingotto'.



Figure 3 FIAT signs in *Riso amaro*



Figure 4 FIAT signs in *Riso amaro*

One of the FIAT workers carries a box of goods, and tells Walter 'l'anno scorso abbiamo fatto una colletta, ma quest'anno portiamo solo un po' di roba a mangiare'. This exchange suggests that the *mondine* belong with the FIAT *operai* in a unified class of manual labourers. Not only is the aesthetic of the opening scene reminiscent of workers' protests, with whistles, placards, and a slowly processing crowd, but the explicit support of FIAT workers aligns the *mondine* with a workforce well-known for ties to trade unions, and the Communist and Socialist political parties (Amendola, 1968). Mangano had previously been used in electoral posters for the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) in 1948 as a factory worker dressed in overalls, and Dino de Laurentiis said that upon seeing this poster while walking with De Santis, he exclaimed his conviction that Silvana was 'la nostra mondina: perché è popolana, è bella, è simpatica, è fresca, è giovane' (Kezich & Levantesi, 2001, p. 71).⁵⁹ All of these elements suggest that the importance of Silvana, and the *mondine* more widely, was to symbolise a politicised working class identity. We are reminded of Lizzani's statement that *Riso amaro* presented a new Italy which featured working women (Sorriso amaro, 2009). De Santis' use of female workers as symbolic of the new nation exemplifies Marcus' remark that, through women, filmmakers portrayed the 'plight of the postwar state' (Marcus, 2000, p. 330) and its class, political, and ideological divisions.

⁵⁹ Despite Mangano's image being used on these posters, Mangano appears to have been 'unknown' by *Riso amaro*'s creators, suggesting that uncredited modelling appearances such as these did little to increase their subjects' renown (Kezich & Levantesi, 2001, pp. 70-72).



Figure 5 Silvana Mangano in a 1948 DC electoral poster. Image captured from the documentary *Sorriso Amaro* (2009)

Not only are the *mondine* of *Riso amaro* and *La risaia* working class, but they are in *miseria*; dire financial or circumstantial need. In the films, there is a clear conflation of the working-class with cheerful penury or poverty and desperation. The concept of *miseria*, roughly translatable as 'poverty' or 'hardship', is prominent throughout the oral histories of *mondine* discussed in Chapter 2. In *Riso amaro*, Silvana says to Francesca, 'almeno hai fatto qualcosa della tua vita, non sei stata sempre in mezzo a questa miseria', underlining her subaltern identity. Similarly foregrounding *miseria*, in *Riso amaro* we are shown the interior of the train carrying the *mondine* to the rice fields. The contracted workers' carriage bustles with the *popolana* sound of singing, chatter, and Silvana's gramophone. Sarah Culhane's typology of the *popolana*, and the regional accent and loud cries which characterise her, can be seen in both the films studied here (Culhane, 2017). With the *popolana* comes the assumption of being 'of the people' and a 'lower-class status' (Culhane, 2017, p. 255). The atmosphere surrounding these *mondine* is of a rustic and utopic working-class female universe which reflects Yuval-Davis' claim that 'women are constructed in the role of "carriers of tradition"' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 61). Dino De Laurentiis' comment that Mangano was 'l'immagine della popolana quella che ci serve' (*Sorriso amaro*, 2009), even calling her an 'unità fisico-semantic' (Kezich & Levantesi, 2001, p. 72), reinforces my argument that *mondine* characters were instrumentalised in order to symbolise the working class.

In contrast, the clandestine workers are transported in gloomy graffitied wagons with no seats. The camera pans the carriage to show a woman swigging directly from a bottle, another looking after a young child, and another anxiously tearing at a hunk of bread. One woman is sleeping on the floor of the train, and two more are hunched over with their faces to the wall. This scene conveys of the clandestine women an image of destitution and desperation. Similarly, in *La risaia*, one *mondina* remarks of Elena, 'si vede che

hai proprio bisogno di lavorare, chi hai lasciato a casa?’, inferring that her work must be motivated by some personal hardship. In his analysis, Antonio Vitti describes the clandestine characters as the ‘vere mondine’ (Vitti, 2011, p. 64), suggesting that film accurately represents the desperation of working women. Representations of the *mondine* either as cheerful peasants, or desperate and impoverished women express the anxiety around women’s political and labour participation in postwar Italy. The authentic peasant type and the desperate woman both reflect stereotypical images of women workers.

Work & the Collective

‘Women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity’s “honour” and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 67). Notions of female interconnectedness and harmonious plurality tally with essentialist notions of innate female preferences and capabilities. In the films, the *mondine* are valorised for their collaboration and collective action. Their work is transformed into a symbolic fight for social justice and class struggle. Lizzani commented on De Santis’ interest in the *mondine* that they represent ‘la presenza subordinata ma al tempo stesso, da un punto di vista proprio arcaico, l’importanza della donna come creatrice di vita, la donna come origine anche di conflitti’ (Carlo Lizzani, 2014). This statement echoes Yuval-Davis’ belief that women operate as the site for reproduction and collective struggle. In an early scene in *Riso amaro*, a dispute is depicted between contracted and non-contracted workers. It is Francesca who acts as a creator, taking the initiative (and defying the male rule of the *caporali*), to integrate the clandestine workers into the legal workforce. Through this, she is ‘regenerated in the rice fields’ (Ben-Ghiat, 1999, p. 96), thanks to her ‘assimilazione al duro lavoro delle mondine’ (Vitti, 2011, p. 66). Her action, however, creates conflict between the different groups of women, and is only resolved with the revisiting of a previously mentioned concept: necessity. When mediating between the two groups of *mondine*, Marco observes of Francesca, ‘forse lei ha più bisogno di lavorare di voi’, and another *crumira* emphasises, ‘non vedete che disgraziate che siamo?’. After ascertaining their common neediness, the prospect of collaboration is established between the women; ‘o via tutte, o lavoro per tutte’.

Ben-Ghiat (1999) has argued that this scene symbolises the forgiving of collaborators and Fascists in Italy after the war, a policy which was supported by left-wing figures like Togliatti in the 1945 general amnesty that released most Fascists from prison (Millar, 1989, p. 18). Here, women workers symbolise the nation’s desire to recriminate and the possibility of forgiveness and progress. In an almost parallel scene in *La risaia*, a fight breaks out between two different squads. However, the resolution to the conflict comes again from a foregrounding of the women’s need to work; one *mondina* asserts, ‘io a casa senza soldi non posso tornare’. In the end, the heroine Elena, like Francesca, takes the initiative and risks sacrificing her individual gain for the collective good. These depictions of conflict and collaboration among the *mondine* exemplify De Santis’ vision of women as creators of life and conflict. The concept of collaboration in any

form was politically charged in the post-World War Two period, and Francesca and Elena's solidarity with their own subaltern class rather than with a ruling elite, render them left-wing heroines perfectly suited to De Santis' political agenda and what Silvana Patriarca describes as the myth of *Italiani brava gente* (Patriarca, 2010).⁶⁰ Marcus argues that instances of collaboration in post-World War Two film connote 'the ephemerality of the regional and class unity achieved by the CLN' (Marcus, 2000, p. 337). Here, *mondine* are symbolic of a united, anti-Fascist nation.

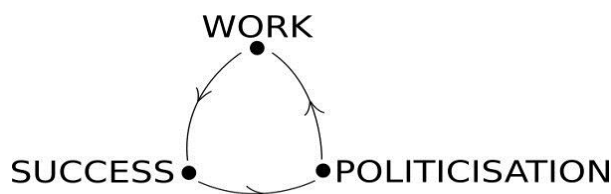
The message behind these portrayals is implicitly left-wing. The *mondine*'s struggles summon ideas of women's 'innate' propensity for peace-building and unity – 'nurturing, creating, sustaining' (Eller, 1995, p. 137) – to symbolise the wider struggle of the subaltern class against an oppressive system. However, in both cases of conflict in the films, the solution is proposed by a masculine presence (Marco in *Riso amaro* and owner Pietro in *La risaia*). Combined with films' emphasis on the *mondine*'s desperation and necessity, this could be read as symptomatic of anxiety around the figures of working women and their power as a collective. Danielle Hipkins observes the 'nervousness engendered by many women's ability to cope without their menfolk during the war, and the notorious attempt to re-establish the postwar status quo' (Hipkins, 2014, p. 45) in film. The same could be argued of representations of the *mondine*'s work: although they gain symbolic value as a successful industrial force, collaboration between the *mondine* is problematised and made contingent on male intervention in a way that speaks of squeamishness over depicting female collective action and empowerment. Such portrayals suggest that although keen to present women as symbolic of collaboration and nation, the films still imagine women's 'nature' to be subordinate to male 'culture' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 6).

The work of the *mondine* in these films also presents them with the opportunity to become the organic intellectuals and class leaders that Gramsci imagined. In his work on hegemony, Gramsci argues that in the struggle for a subaltern class to become hegemonic, organic intellectuals are essential. These subjects stand in opposition to traditional intellectuals; arising 'from within and [...] passionately connected to, the subaltern class' (Meek, 2015, p. 1181). Organic intellectuals demonstrate 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, permanent persuader and not just a simple orator' (Gramsci, 1978, p. 10). The *mondine* are part of a subaltern class, and the figures of Francesca and Elena are the organic intellectuals who catalyse them into collective action.

No better examples of the organic election of a leader through class-belonging can be seen than in the figures of Francesca in *Riso amaro* and Elena in *La risaia*. Francesca recounts her life as a maid, describing her working-class, but not agricultural, background. Elena's upbringing, with her single mother who works in the kitchen of a *trattoria*, the dingy setting of her maternal home, and the very fact that she leaves home to work, underline her working-class status. The journey of these heroines to represent a subaltern class reflects Gramsci's theory of the organic intellectual coming from the subaltern class and

⁶⁰ Patriarca describes this myth as the notion that Italians are 'a good, humane people, basically untainted by fascism' (Patriarca, 2010, p. 189).

acting as ‘constructor, organizer, permanent persuader’ (Gramsci, 1978, p. 10). It is their leadership skills and struggle for collective good which lead them and their comrades to success. In both films, success is pinned as winning the right to work, thus creating a strong link between work, politicisation, and collective realisation. This portrayal of women gaining success through work and political activism is unusual for films made between 1945 and 1965 and reflects a slim opportunity for women to be symbolically and practically emancipated by work. It is important that the *mondine*’s success must be collective, rather than individual, and echoes the notion that ‘women are associated in the collective imagination [...] with the collective [...] future’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 45). Directors’ choice to show women as negotiators for subaltern rights also supports the idea of women as ‘carriers of the collectivity’s “honour”’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 67).



(Derounian, 2017)

Impegno

As in the Italian word, *impegno*, in the films the concept of work is blurred with that of politicisation and activism. The films show activism to be part and parcel of women’s work.⁶¹ In *Riso amaro*, the trajectory of the two female protagonists demonstrates Marxist doctrine on the redemptive power of industrial collaboration, and the destructive path of individualism. Francesca, originally an accessory to armed robbery, collaborates with her co-workers to gain employment rights, ultimately saves industrial production, and ends the film framed in an upshot, walking towards a future with the moral hero Marco. Considering Richard Dyer’s theory of star signification which considers the paratextual meanings of actors, even Francesca’s relationship with Marco connotes and promotes the Left. Marco is played by Raf Vallone, an ex-partisan and journalist with *La gazzetta del popolo* and *L’Unità* in Piedmont. Dyer’s argument (1998, p. 1) that stars had a ‘signification’ which went beyond the specific character they were portraying would support Louis Bayman’s assertion that Vallone’s character represents the left-wing hope ‘that after the Partisan Resistance the Italian army might become a popular militia’ (Bayman, 2011, p. 63).

Silvana, on the other hand, represents the bad apple of the working classes. She is seduced by liberalism and Americanisation, manifested in the film through boogie woogie and chewing gum. She

⁶¹ It is historically accurate that *mondine* often manifested their political views through their industrial action. For example, Joelle De Lacroix (1971, p. 72) notes how ‘les mondine se heurtent violement aux carabinieri et à la milice fasciste en criant les noms du Gramsci, Terrani, Scorcimano, Romeda, Flecchia, Negarville, etc. tous arrêtés et condamnés’.

desires individual intrigue rather than collective survival. She betrays her comrades and is transformed from the popular darling of the rice fields into a lifeless heap, estranged from her community. Of her character, Lizzani tells us:

Proprio in quel personaggio di Silvana [si manifestavano] tutti i momenti di inquietudine, di ripiegamento individualistico e di scivolamento in senso già consumistico e neocapitalistico che si sarebbero manifestati – anche all'interno delle masse lavoratrici – nel decennio ad avvenire (Lizzani, 2009, p. 87).

Silvana and the burden of class and nation she bears demonstrate how women workers are used as symbols rather than representatives. It is Silvana's role within the collective which renders her so much a traitor. Walter, who is already living on the fringes of society, is only symbolic of himself.

There are some brief instances in the films which suggest that women are empowered and emancipated by their work. In *Riso amaro*, one of the *mondine* recounts her relationship with a sailor, saying 'sono io che ho lasciato lui! Non ha più imbarcato, dovevo mantenerlo io, con il mio mestiere. Adesso mi sono stuffata'. This introduces the idea that a woman might financially support a man, and further that she might make an autonomous choice to stop doing so. In *La risaia*, Elena is able to reject what she believes to be the romantic advances of Pietro, despite other characters' suggestions that this would be a quick route to affluence and ease. Her work empowers her to independence. These portrayals depict the *mondine* as achieving relative liberation through their work. However, they are only liberated when they stay within traditional female gender norms. As Bonifazio points out, 'Elena both embodies aspirations of prosperity [...] and shows a sense of decency and respect towards traditional values' (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 47). Francesca too only becomes emancipated by her work when she renounces her life of crime and extra-marital romance and begins to pursue an honest, naïve infatuation with Marco.

A final observation to be made of the portrayal of *mondine*'s work is their association with the military. Comparisons between the *mondine* and soldiers appear in both (pre-World War Two) historiography, and in film. Castelli observes 'questo temporaneo sradicamento le avvicinava per un verso al coscritto e al soldato, ma per l'altro introduceva nella loro vita elementi di solidarietà e di coscienza di sé e della classe di appartenenza' (Castelli, et al., 2005, p. xvii). The nature of their work and its parallels with military life is described as one of the predisposing factors to the *mondine*'s collaboration and political activism. The link between *mondine* and military is also present in the vocabulary used to describe their organisation in the rice fields, with the use of titles such as *caporale* and *squadra* taken directly from military parlance.⁶² In the films, the *mondine* are divided and named according to their local area, as in army regiments. Visually, these squads are represented in long shots marching in lines to the *risaie* or

⁶² An ex *caporale* speaking in the documentary *Sorriso amaro* (2003) says of the organisation in the rice fields, 'era una manovra strategica'.

linking arms to cross treacherous ground. There are frequent references to the military in the choice of music and song in both films. In *La risaia*, the opening scene features a song which appears to make direct reference to the alpine military song, 'mamma mia vienimi incontro'.⁶³ The lyrics replace the phrase 'la mia vita militare' with 'la mia vita di risaia'. Similarly, in the scene showing Gabriella's miscarriage, the *mondine* adapt the extremely famous *Testamento del capitano*, an alpine military song which became widely known during World War One for its anti-war message.⁶⁴ Throughout the film, long shots of the women working in the rice fields are accompanied by the extradiagetic marching beat of a drum.

In *Riso amaro*, the *mondine's* link to the army is even more explicit. The *mondine* physically replace an army unit which has been lodging in the farm buildings while it practices manoeuvres in the surrounding countryside. Once the *mondine* take up residence in the *cascina* the soldiers' slogans painted on the walls become the *mondine's* own. Marco's philosophical graffiti is modified by the *mondine* to read, 'vivo morendo in caserma risaia, non in tempo di guerra ma in tempo di vita'.



Figure 6 Graffiti in the caserma in *Riso amaro*

It is interesting that a group of working women should be portrayed as soldiers, arguably the symbol of traditional masculinity *par excellence*. Yet 'militaries and warfare have never been just a "male zone"' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 93), Yuval-Davis argues; the militarised yet non-military context of the *mondine* supports this. The militarisation of working women recalls ideas of female characters bearing Italian collective and national symbolism following World War Two.

⁶³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV-8C77VE0M> [Accessed 01/07/2018].

⁶⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ggk_V867syE [Accessed 01/07/2018].

Solidarity

Solidarity was a concept much celebrated by both Left and Right between 1945 and 1965. Ginsborg notes that 'solidarity (*solidarismo*), charity, associationism [...] were constant themes' (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 153) in post-World War Two Italian discourse. These notions were also essential to the popular doctrines of Marx and Gramsci, and were a key feature of working-class consciousness and struggle. In Chapter 2's oral testimonies with *mondine*, solidarity is a point of pride for interviewees, and this is mirrored in these films. The clearest filmic examples of solidarity can be found in instances where a *mondina* is in peril. In *Riso amaro*, the *mondina* Gabriella miscarries while at work in the rice fields. The other *mondine* instantly respond, picking Gabriella up and lying her on the bank. Their bodies form a tableau which physically and emotionally shields Gabriella.



Figure 7 The *mondine* encircle Gabriella as she miscarries in *Riso amaro*

Eventually, Francesca lifts Gabriella and carries her to the *cascina* in a move which consolidates Francesca's transformation, 'to become a leader and, quite literally, a carrier of women' (Pierson, 2008, p. 275). Francesca's behaviour demonstrates what Gramsci describes as the second stage of the *rapporto di forze politiche* and *autocoscienza*; when all members of a social class recognise the need for solidarity between them (Gramsci, 2014, p. XXX).⁶⁵ The other *mondine* similarly lend their symbolic support to Gabriella by singing, in what is ostensibly an attempt to hide from the *caporali* the fact of Gabriella's physical

⁶⁵ This is distinct from the first stage of class consciousness when solidarity is only identified as necessary between workers of the same sector: 'un commerciante sente di dover essere solidale con un altro commerciante, un fabbricante con un altro fabbricante' (Gramsci, 2014, p. XXX).

incapacitation, but which De Santis calls a demonstration ‘di laica protesta avverso una condizione di lavoro femminile brutale e infamante’ (De Santis, 1987). This episode is essentially feminine in nature, and politically-charged in substance; Vitti reads it as ‘la dimostrazione della solidarietà di classe e della partecipazione corale contadina al dolore’ (Vitti, 2011, p. 71). These instances of solidarity are gendered, revolving around fertility and physical fragility; women’s unique capacity for solidarity is articulated through their bodies, maternity, and the earth. This is somewhat problematic because it brings female collaboration into the realm of the hyperfeminized and bodily, glossing over the reality of the coordinated, committed, and sometimes violent industrial action of this female workforce. However, Francesca does use her body for a surprising, almost masculine show of strength and protection, thus consolidating her role as a woman empowered to political consciousness through her work.

In an almost identical scene in *La risaia*, the *mondina* Angela faints and is carried off by her colleagues, whilst the remaining *mondine* intone a song of solidarity. Beyond a portrayal of solidarity, this incident gives space to the expression of distinctly counter-hegemonic discourse; following her departure, one *mondina* comments, ‘se ancora in un’ora non riprende il lavoro, perde pure la paga dell’intera giornata’, soliciting the sarcastic retort, ‘giusto! La colpa è sua se è svenuta!’. Here, the women are united in their contempt for the ruling elite who dictate unfair terms of employment.

Silvana of *Riso amaro*, on the other hand, is understood to represent the antithesis of solidarity. Although Silvana’s story counters Francesca’s journey from individualism to collaboration, Silvana’s betrayal of her gender and class is more ambiguous than it may first appear. Despite being coerced and abused by Walter, Silvana still argues with his scheme to steal the harvest, saying ‘questo riso doveva essere distribuito domani alle mie compagne, e non è neanche tanto’. Silvana also gives away her rice earnings to Gabriella’s sister, to compensate for the loss of income which Gabriella’s miscarriage and incapacitation cause. Despite her wish for individual escape, Silvana still attempts to soften the blow of the theft for her companions. Of this act, another *mondina* says ‘sarà un po’ matta, ma non è cattiva’. This observation is important to understanding Silvana’s character, and recalls De Santis’ inspiration for Silvana’s character of Padron ‘Ntoni from *I Malavoglia*. Padron ‘Ntoni is a tragic figure, who is plagued by misfortune’ (Pierson, 2008, p. 278). The alignment of Silvana with this cult literary figure attributes Silvana’s moral decay and betrayal to the *miseria* of her life, rather than any innate evil. Silvana herself confirms this when Marco accuses her, ‘boogie woogie, romanzi, *Grand Hôtel*, non sai vedere altro?’, responding ‘infatti, è tutto quello che vedo dalla mattina alla sera con i piedi nell’acqua’. This statement reinforces the notion that Silvana’s escape into Americanism and self-interest is motivated by the misery of her daily life. Her betrayal is to be pitied, and read as a critique of neoliberalism, rather than a condemnation of her character. The trope of women trading on their sexuality in film to express anxiety in postwar Italy has been remarked

upon more widely.⁶⁶ This strategy demonstrates the tendency of film to use women's solidarity or lack thereof to express the moral impact of war.

In their moments of collaboration, *mondine* in film express left-wing critiques which would not have been out of place in the mouth of Togliatti; critiques of the ruling classes, and assertions that crime is motivated by social marginalisation and poverty.⁶⁷ As I will argue in Chapter 2, it is important to recognise the political nature of representations of the *mondine*, because it reflects the under-exposed political character of women's work (Rossi-Doria, 2000, p. 361). Yet, the use of women to articulate wider political and national concerns diverts attention from their professional identities, often in ways which draw focus to their bodies. Women are, as Eller records, 'trapped in the metaphor' (Eller, 1995, p. 137) of their own bodies.

Chorality

Chorality is used in the films to portray women workers as a cohesive collective. As one *mondina* explains in *Riso amaro*, 'non si parla sul lavoro. Se hai qualche cosa da dire dilla cantando'. As is true of other exploited groups, the *mondine*'s songs evolved far beyond simple communication to become political statements in themselves; often inspired by partisan or military sources, the *mondine* sang songs of resistance, social critique, and revolution.⁶⁸ The songs they sang have become anthems for left-wing groups today, with the most famous, 'Se Otto Ore Vi Sembrano Poche', becoming widely sung during the *biennio rosso*, as well as 'Bella Ciao' during the Second World War.⁶⁹ The songs are unique in their polyphony, an aspect which in itself connotes and necessitates collaboration. For these reasons, the *mondine*'s songs evoke women's bearing of the collectivity and the essentialist notion of female immanence; 'the awareness of the world and everything in it as alive, dynamic, interdependent, interacting' (Starhawk, 1993, p. 9).

Chorality is not exclusive to song. Elizabeth Alsop defines chorality as a spatialization of the voice, a rejection of any local identity belonging to a voice, thus rendering it indicative of a collective identity' (Alsop, 2014, p. 31). Chorality is said to be particularly related to neorealist film (Alsop, 2014, p. 28), but of the two films in question, it is *La risaia* which features more moments of song. We might connect chorality with the left-wing aspirations of neorealism to portray 'real' subaltern peoples. Many moments of both *Riso amaro* and *La risaia* portray chorality, particularly those scenes which show a chattering, laughing,

⁶⁶ See (Hipkins, 2016) and (Marcus, 2000, p. 336).

⁶⁷ This echoes Castelli's observation that the *mondine* 'trovarono infine nel socialismo un'ideologia forte e nelle organizzazioni sociali contadine una struttura praticabile di emancipazione e di riscatto' (Castelli, et al., 2005, p. 4).

⁶⁸ See Castelli et al. (2005), recent works by Cristina Ghirardini (2012), and Cristina Ghirardini & Susanna Venturi (2011), and Chapter 2 for analysis of documentaries on the *cori delle mondine*.

⁶⁹ More recently, 'Bella Ciao' has been adapted by a number of subculture artists, including hardcore punk band Flexus. It was also sung in the recent Spanish Netflix drama *Casa del Papel* (2017).

shouting, singing mass of *mondine*. In her analysis of chorality in neorealist film, Alsop notes three aspects which I deem to be important to this chapter: that chorality is ‘a device used by directors not to reflect an existing social group so much as to project or enact an imaginary one’; that it is used ‘as a means of representing the voices of an existing class or group, which is almost inevitably a disenfranchised one’; and that chorality acts to evoke ‘amplitude and solidarity; to convert individual affects or experiences into collective ones’ (Alsop, 2014, p. 28). These features are important to this section, to argue that portrayals of *mondine* reflect a fantasy, imagined in order to express left-wing sentiment about the oppression of a subaltern class, and that they are portrayed as a collective rather than individuals to glorify the left-wing concepts of solidarity and collective action. Culhane’s (2017) notion of the *popolana* also relates to chorality, as the collective and uncoordinated noise speaks to our understanding of these women as *popolari*.

The first instances of chorality in both *Riso amaro* and *La risaia* are the grand sequences showing the *mondine*’s departure to the rice fields. These moments are marked by the merging of individuals into one collective force. In *Riso amaro*, the commentator for Radio Torino tells listeners, ‘vengono da ogni parte d’Italia, è una mobilitazione di donne di tutte le età, e di tutte le professioni’. We are then told we will hear ‘la parola di una mondariso, una tra le tante’. However, instead of hearing the voice of one *mondina*, the interview is drowned out in the collective song of the women as they depart. Here, the film demonstrates the primacy of representing the *mondine* as collective rather than individual. This scene uses a crane shot to follow the women mingling together like the tracks of a train. Similarly, the opening scene of *La risaia* shows wagon-loads of *mondine* arriving at the farmhouse, singing and chatting in a way which mingles diegetic and extra-diegetic sound. Upon arrival at the farmhouse, the noise increases as the *mondine* jump from the wagons and run towards their dormitories, shouting and thronging. The audiovisuals of both these opening sequences reflect the convergence of many women into one collective, ‘powerfully dramatiz[ing] the kind of collectivity that becomes a central theme of the film’ (Alsop, 2014, p. 31). These scenes demonstrate women as ‘embodiments of the collectivity’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 23).

Chorality is also deployed in the scenes showing the *mondine* beginning their work. In *Riso amaro*, they sing and shout as wide-brimmed hats are distributed. Again, both the visuals and audio serve to collectivise the women; the hats lend them a homogenous group identity – particularly when shown from above – reflecting the chorality of the sound, to generate the impression of amplitude and solidarity (Alsop, 2014, p. 28). In *La risaia*, the women are similarly shot in wide panning shots, showing them linking arms, with crooning singing in the background. Again, visual and audio effects mirror one another to portray the *mondine* as cohesive group. In *Riso amaro*, both Francesca and Silvana use song to communicate their beliefs and rally a collective force. Francesca intones, ‘meglio svelte con l’aria fina perché il sole poi spacca giù / poveretta la clandestina che lavora di più di più’, which is answered by the *clandestine* who repeat her sentiment in four-part harmony. This chorality is a powerful example of women collaborating for resistance. This scene also underlines Silvana and Francesca as the organic leaders of their social groups, capable of summoning a female collective to support them.

In both *Riso amaro* and *La risaia*, the chorality of the *mondine*'s song is contrasted with music from a gramophone. There is a stark contrast between the forthright swell of the *mondine*'s voices and the thin strains of gramophone rock n' roll. In both films, the gramophone is a reminder of modernity and foreign influence. Both films equate gramophone music with disaster; in *Riso amaro*, Silvana first meets Walter while dancing to a record, and in *La risaia* Elena is criticised by the other *mondine* for supposedly seducing the farm owner over the background strains of a gramophone. The directors' juxtaposition of the 'authentic' voices of the women and a single anonymous mechanical voice reinforces the films' idealisation of the *mondine* as a unified and collaborative workforce. The authenticity or Italianness of the voices is important in evoking their political symbolism; as Castelli observes: 'la coralità dell'azione delle mondine [...] porta alla mente l'azione di difesa delle fabbriche nei giorni dell'insurrezione' (Castelli, et al., 2005, p. 102). The chorality in both films reflects the solidarity, promoting the 'breadth and even universality [of this value] beyond the immediate enunciative site' (Alsop, 2014, p. 31). It is interesting that so female and so unthreatening a medium such as song is deployed to transmit such combative messages and social critique. Unlike women's roles in the Resistance, which historians claim have been accorded a 'secondary importance' (Willson, 2010, p. 105), the *mondine*'s songs (and their political content) have been accorded an affectionate place in Italian memory. The contemporary popularity of *mondine*'s song suggests that the cultural canonisation of women workers is more likely if their activism is expressed in a traditionally feminine medium.

Bodies & Sexuality

Marcus observes that sexualised female figures provide a canvas 'on which postwar filmmakers will base their critique of the national self' (Marcus, 2000, p. 330). A similar observation could be made of filmic *mondine*. The work and the identities of *mondine* are reduced to the sexualised body both by films, and later by scholars and critics. This historical focus on the sexualised bodies of female workers makes me loath to contribute to it; and yet in order to critique it is necessary to evoke it.

Sexual transgression and promiscuity have become very much associated with the *mondine* as a labour force, and film has played a role in this. Historically, the *mondine* were migratory workers, existing temporarily away from the moral anchors of the family, Church, and local community. These conditions have meant that commentators have often sought and found evidence of promiscuity among *mondine*. Historian Guido Crainz cites a contemporary of the *mondine*, who notes a 'depravazione del senso morale e dei sani costumi [...] favorita dalla promiscuità tra uomini e donne' (Crainz, 1994, p. 4). Similar observations are made in the documentaries and oral histories of Chapter 2. The inclined position in which the *mondine* toiled, and the atmospheric conditions of heat and humidity which led them to somewhat expose their bodies, may also have contributed to a sexualisation of their work. De Santis himself described the rice fields as: 'un'esplosione di sessualità femminile esposta tutto il giorno al sole, di corpi detonanti, di seni in

ebollizione, di grembi invitanti [...] cosce nude [...] vigorosi polpacci, bocche infiammate e polpute' (De Santis, 1987, p. 122). Sexualising the *mondine* objectifies them for a fantasised male spectator, diverting their identity as workers. Their sexualisation also expresses the implicit threat of female workers, highlighted by De Santis' violent vocabulary of explosion and detonation, more reminiscent of battle than of agriculture.

Even in the way that *Riso amaro* and *La risaia* were marketed, women's work was eclipsed by their sexuality. American publicity for *La risaia* bore the tagline 'Men are animals ... I'm here to work – nothing more!' (Betz, 2013, p. 501).



Figure 8 US publicity for *La risaia*

This summarises the impossibility for the *mondine* of maintaining an identity as workers when so many phantom male eyes look on. Both *Riso amaro* and *La risaia* support Mark Betz's claim that the films betray 'a frequent concentration on the imaging of sexuality, especially female sexuality, as iconic markers of the films' purported content' (Betz, 2013, p. 501). The films echo Eller's notion that women are 'trapped in the metaphor of [their] own physical bod[ies]' (Eller, 1995, p. 137), connoting sex rather than work.

The sexualisation of the *mondine*'s work is important because it reflects a discomfort with working women, and an attempt to divert their identity. *Riso amaro* passed the censors, but it did not measure up to the 'giudizi intransigenti dei censori del Vaticano, i quali, per preservare il pubblico dalle tentazioni della sensualità di Silvana, inclusero il film nella lista delle opere proibite' (Vitti, 2011, p. 54). Similarly, critics of *La risaia* commented on the 'compiacenza, con cui vengono presentate, senza ragione, numerose ragazze in costumi succinti' (Casadio, 1990, p. 112). However, the box-office earnings of both films should not be ignored. We should be aware of a discrepancy between the theoretical moral reception of female sexuality

by some critical and religious institutions, and the reception of these female characters by the public and industry.

If Catholic and left-wing organisations hoped for innocent, rustic portrayals of the *mondine*, the films do nothing to serve this end. In both films, the protagonists and supporting characters display problematised sexual behaviour in a way which eclipses their working and political identities. To cite just one example in *Riso amaro*, protagonist Silvana flirts suggestively with Marco and Walter, sneaking off with both to deserted outbuildings. Even before this we are aware of her sexual knowledge as she negotiates with the *caporali*, using coquettish glances and drawing their attention to her body to manipulate them, only to slap away their hands, with a curt 'giù le mani' when she obtains her wish. Silvana's rape itself is also framed as proof of the danger of female sexuality. Silvana is quite literally beaten with the stick of her own sexuality; originally used to keep him at a distance, the stick is snatched by Walter and ultimately used against her for sexual violence. Whilst capitalising on women's sexuality, the films simultaneously demonstrate the danger of sexualising women, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Ruberto reads Silvana's rape as signifying 'not only a defilement of her body but of all *mondine*' (Ruberto, 2008, p. 46). The message is clear: women who use their bodies as sexual capital risk not only their own personal downfall, but that of their class, gender, and nation.⁷⁰

For female sexuality to be punishable, it first has to be shown to be exploited by protagonists; a key way in which this is done is through dance. Dance scenes allow for *mondine*'s bodies to be gazed upon and sexualised, while credibly maintaining them in their folkloric, working-class setting. The nature of dance means that women's bodies become the focus of the gaze of both intra- and extra-diegetic spectators. Laura Mulvey theorises the use of the cinematic apparatus to create a sexualising heterosexual male outlook (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey calls this the male gaze and argues that it is objectifying, and diverts the meaning of female subjects into objects of sexual pleasure without agency. In both *Riso amaro* and *La risaia* dance is used to objectify and problematise the sexualised female body.

In *Riso amaro*, Silvana is introduced to spectators dancing a boogie woogie, in a scene which perfectly exemplifies Mulvey's theory (1975). Here, the camera pans from Francesca and Walter who openly stare, across the marvelling faces of onlookers, to pan slowly up Mangano's body from her bare legs to her face.

⁷⁰ This is supported by Marcus' analysis of female characters in De Sica's *La Ciocara* (1960), who 'become texts onto which history inscribes its most atrocious incursions' (Marcus, 2000, p. 335).



Figure 9 Panning shot up Silvana's dancing body in *Riso amaro*

This technique demonstrates that 'in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*' (Mulvey, 1999, pp. 837-38). This otherwise innocuous scene of women preparing to migrate for work becomes a perversion of their purpose; the *mondine* are not there as workers but as bodies to be gazed upon by male characters and the fantasised spectator. This dance scene, and another in which Silvana and Walter perform a boogie woogie, are moments of suspense and corruption articulated through the dancing female body. Mulvey reminds us that the male gaze acts to 'freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation' (Mulvey, 1999, pp. 837-838). It is this erotic contemplation, however, which causes disaster. Walter's attraction to Silvana catalyses a chain of events which lead to her downfall, and her boogie-woogie is the impetus for their first meeting. It is also the direct precursor to

violence in the form of an armed police chase. In a later scene showing the *mondine* climbing over the wall of the farm to consort with men, Silvana dances a boogie-woogie. This scene is the first time we see her directly participating in criminality, as she wears the necklace she knows to be stolen. Silvana's dance aptly demonstrates the problems of displaying and sexualising the female body by linking it to exploitation and corruption.

Moreover, we are shown that Silvana's sexual behaviour is in fact commonplace among the *mondine*; in a long shot panning the length of a high wall, we see the *mondine* receiving messages from and consorting with men who have congregated around their lodgings. One of the men declares in a message, 'sono dodici mesi che penso a te', and another 'abbiamo ballato insieme l'altro anno', suggesting that these women engage in brief seasonal relationships with men from the area. Later, we see the same scene at night. If we are in any doubt of the sexual nature of these encounters, one man suggests to his partner, 'ho trovato un posticino sotto i pioppi che è una delizia, erba alta così!'. In this way, the sexual behaviour of the *mondine* in *Riso amaro* is portrayed as a class epidemic.

In *La risaia* too, promiscuity is repeatedly referenced and condemned. The *mondina* who proposes to Mario that he should 'rimediare' his initial preference for Elena and court her is ultimately disappointed, and jilted in a scene where he violently twists her arm. In *La risaia*, *mondine* who use their bodies to gain a fast pass to social promotion are also condemned by Gianni, who says 'vi lasciate incantare dalle fuoriserie poi [...] ti piantano in mezzo alla strada'. He seamlessly elides this observation with a story about a *mondina* who was found 'strangolata in un fosso'. At the end of *La risaia* another *mondina* recounts how, when she asked her sweetheart if he would marry her, he responded, 'che me la compro a fare la mucca se il latte è così buon mercato?'. If women's sexual transgressions are supposed to mirror the moral wartime transgressions of the nation, these examples make it clear that women bear the burden of the collectivity and its honour. Bearing such meanings subsumes the *mondine*'s identity as workers.

Similarly to *Riso amaro*, in *La risaia* disaster follows moments of dance. However, the male gaze is avoided, in medium shots which show Elena dancing with a female companion at a local fête.⁷¹ Mario, noticing her, attempts to break in on the dance, but is rejected. Mechanic Gianni arrives on the scene and starts a jealous fight to protect Elena's honour. Again, dance catalyses male violence. Later, the film climaxes in a scene where Elena becomes drunk, shows her legs, and dances closely with several men. Mario arrives, and this time the threat of his gaze is apparent in a close-up.

⁷¹ *La risaia*'s avoidance of actually reproducing the male gaze reinforces Uffreduzzi's observation that Matarazzo's film removed 'what made dancing sinful in the eyes of the Catholic Church' (Uffreduzzi, 2017, p. 75).



Figure 10 Mario gazes at Elena in *La risaia*

This scene presents striking aesthetic similarities with *Riso amaro*, including an exact copy of a shot of Silvana where Elena lifts her hands to her face, exposing her armpits and chest to the camera's gaze.



Figure 11 Silvana dances in *Riso amaro*



Figure 12 Elena dances in *La risaia*

This scene sets in motion an attempted rape and the consequent murder of Elena's attacker. We can observe in these filmic examples that dance equals an opportunity to express female sexuality, but that sexuality is the catalyst for corruption, moral transgression and violence. These portrayals exemplify 'the threat to the larger social order posed by [the female] eroticised body' (Marcus, 2000, p. 339).

The portrayal of female workers as corrupting, sexualised bodies is also problematic in terms of historical faithfulness. The moral associations of the *mondine's* dance – particularly their type of dance – were seized upon by critics. Vitti highlights that 'alcuni leader sindacalisti di sinistra difesero l'innocenza e la moralità delle mondine ribattendo che era loro abitudine e desiderio danzare al ritmo confortante dei tradizionali canti popolari piuttosto che al suono del fuorviante boogie-woogie americano, come mostrato nel film' (Vitti, 2011, p. 57), De Santis also intervened on the issue, saying 'alcuni sindacalisti protestarono dicendo che sull'aia le mondine non ballavano il *boogie-woogie* ma il valzer, che non leggevano solo *Grand Hotel* e che io le trattavo come prostitute [...]. La cultura delle mondariso era quella che io descrivevo nel mio film' (Castelli, et al., 2005, p. 100).⁷² Both of these quotes show the political nature of representations of female bodies and sexuality.

Bodies & Landscape

The tendency to equate women with the national landscape is one identified by scholars (Caldwell, 2000, p. 136), and in postwar Italy was invested with ideas about potential and rebirth of a damaged nation. Gundle argues that an association between Italian women and the land and nation is one of the ways that post-World War Two Italy overcame memories of war guilt, Fascism and collaboration. In this process it was necessary to:

Build for the first time while simultaneously going to one's own roots [...]; by seeking the origin [one] cannot but dig into the earth that contains it. The earth, that is the landscape in its widest meaning. The origin, that is the place of a mother or [...] of the feminine (Gundle, 2007, p. 145).

Gundle's analysis presents a striking similarity with the later theories of Goddess Feminism, where 'the earth is feminine [...] nurturing, creating, sustaining, giving birth' (Eller, 1995, p. 137). Indeed, when women are portrayed working the land, elements of reproduction and fertility are evoked. Angela Dalle Vacche's observation about neorealism's 'reliance on physiognomy' (1996, p. 53) reveals the line between neorealism and melodrama that *Riso amaro* was treading; but more than the face, De Santis' film is

⁷² The two films actually present very different types of dance; *Riso amaro* is marked by American boogie woogie, whereas *La risaia* shows only traditional polka and mazurkas, and most often shows the women dancing together, rather than in mixed-sex couples. Uffreduzzi observes that Matarazzo complements the traditional dance forms with other elements like the rustic accordion accompaniment and Elena's clearly visible crucifix, thus removing 'what made dancing sinful in the eyes of the Catholic Church' (Uffreduzzi, 2017, p. 75).

interested in the female body. The very first moments of *Riso amaro* introduce us to women's connection to the land, with the presenter of Radio Torino announcing, 'su questa pianura, hanno impresso segni incancellabili di milioni e milioni di mane di donne'. Gundle comments on the specific case of Mangano that she was 'presented as a creature of the earth, an archetype whose generous figure, overt sensuality and instinctive simplicity lent her a primitive, primeval quality' (Gundle, 2007, p. 145). *Riso amaro* marked the beginning of an international obsession with Mangano's *maggiorata* body which Mangano herself grew to hate, eventually becoming 'un'immagine che lei ha voluto come cancellare' (Sorriso amaro, 2009). Marcus argues that Silvana's death was symbolic of 'the doubleness of the sexualised body politic' (Marcus, 2000, p. 337). On one hand, women's bodies are effective carriers of national identity. On another, the sexualised female body is corrupting and must be destroyed, preferably by the woman herself. This dynamic means that women are disempowered by the metaphorical meanings they must bear.

Mangano's case draws our attention to a special feature of Italian identity: a nation so assimilated with fertility and natural bounty could only find lasting sex symbols in women whose bodies reflected this. Mangano, like Sofia Loren, only became truly iconic because of her début in rural film. Culhane's research on the popularity of *popolana* figures of Loren and Anna Magnani and their 'naturalezza' and 'autenticità' (Culhane, 2017, p. 254) corroborates this. Other actresses whose bodies failed to make this link – such as Lucia Bosè – have not reached the same symbolic national status.⁷³

Although Elsa Martinelli and *La risaia* reached nothing like the same level of stardom as Mangano, we can observe some effort to make the same connection between her body and the landscape.



Figure 13 The opening titles of *La risaia* position Martinelli's name in a rural landscape

⁷³ Gundle comments that although Bosè came to represent a kind of working class, she 'did not fit so apparently naturally into the rural context. Her fine features and grace exemplified the rise of the working classes in a quite different way' (Gundle, 2007, p. 147).



Figure 14 Elena is pictured walking through the rural landscape in *La risaia*



Figure 15 Elena is framed at the center of the rural landscape in *La risaia*

La risaia's colour filming in CinemaScope adds depth to those shots aligning the *mondine* with their surroundings, showing 'landscape and womanhood as connected, each an instrument of nature's bounty' (Betz, 2013, p. 501). If, as Gundle asserts, the postwar context and need for rebirth and rebuilding were the keys to Silvana's symbolism and *Riso amaro*'s immediate cultural canonisation, it is mobility and modernity which Martinelli's body represents.⁷⁴ Her waif-like frame and sharp features reflected the new American-style models of femininity to arrive in Italy. Her body is gazed upon in a similar way to Mangano's – particularly in the scene where she dances alone, lifting her arms and gazing into a medium close-up (see

⁷⁴ This is, in fact, rather a simplification. Réka Buckley (2006) suggests that although she was one of the major stars of the 1950s, Martinelli has not become nationally symbolic in the way of Sofia Loren or Silvana Mangano because she lacked links with influential cinema power players. Buckley also observes that Martinelli's career was always more international than Italian (her breakthrough acting successes being in Hollywood film *The Indian Fighter* (De Toth, 1955).

Figures 11 and 12 on page 56). Yet, 'ha le ascelle rasate' (Morreale, 2011, p. 278), a fact which differentiates her both in aesthetic and socio-historical context from Mangano. Martinelli's body and eventual labelling as a *ragazza yé-yé* (Uffreduzzi, 2017, p. 75) are easily assimilable with the dynamic, outward-looking 'Italia di rimbalzo' (Morreale, 2011, p. 277) that 1960s Italy so wished to be. However, the exploitation of the female body for national symbolism is problematic. Mangano supposedly detested the portrayal of her body in *Riso amaro*, yet Lizzani described her like 'a beautiful animal or a beautiful tree' (Gundle, 2007, p. 147). This contradiction perhaps evidences the removal of female agency from these roles (and actresses) when they are used as fleshy metaphors rather than real representatives.

Conclusion

Riso amaro and *La risaia* are unique in presenting not only female working protagonists but also collectives of female workers. Their characters show women as influential and engaged. Particularly *Riso amaro* is largely responsible for the renown of the *mondine* in Italian society. However, the films' portrayals of women's work are problematic. *Riso amaro* features a scene in which Silvana poses for a photojournalist and is joined by Marco, to the disgust of the photographer who cries 'era meglio prima, gli uomini rovinano l'arte'. One can't help feeling that both De Sica and Matarazzo shared this view, and used women's bodies to carry the symbolism of their art or politics. Silvana's death – suicide being, 'above all, a woman's solution' (Loraux, 1991, p. 8) – showcases the intense symbolism of the female body. Her corpse is left on the ground of the rice field and is covered with handfuls of rice from her co-workers, reabsorbing her into her class and collective. But Silvana was doomed from the beginning; because of her female body, she could not be anything other than sexualised and subsequently corrupted. Just as Silvana's body manifests 'rival meanings she cannot reconcile' (Marcus, 2000, p. 339), in the period following World War Two, the *mondine* could not be anything other than symbolic of the nation. In the next chapter, we will see how the *mondine* reproduce discourse around their role in national rebirth in oral histories. The two films studied here exhibit how the bodies of the *mondine* were used to assimilate women with national identity, landscape, and (re)production. Yuval-Davis has argued that women have long been linked to, and made responsible for, the demographic, military and economic success of the nation through maternity (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Filmic portrayals heighten the idea of women as 'fertile ground' and displace labour onto the fertile female body. The concept is conservative, refiguring the female worker as bearer and mother of the nation.

Chapter 2 – *Mondine* in Oral History

Descend the stairs at the CGIL archive in Bologna and you will find yourself standing before a framed image of Maria Margotti, a woman who was assassinated at an agricultural protest, and has become synonymous with Italian rice weeders' political activism. Yet, Margotti was not only an occasional *mondina* but, like the *mondine* as a wider group, her memory has been instrumentalised over time to symbolise a fantasised peasant class, an anti-Fascist nation, and an idyllic left-wing legacy. As already discussed in Chapter 1, the *mondine* served this postwar purpose for 'the formation of newly cleansed collective identities' (Ben-Ghiat, 1999, p. 83). As noted in Chapter 1, Micaela Gavioli, archivist and researcher at the UDI in Ferrara, underlines the creation of a fantasised *mondina* figure, saying 'personalmente non credo esista una memoria nazionale delle mondine. La figura della *mondina* è stata in qualche modo sfruttata da tutti [...] farcita di stereotipi e di retorica' (Gavioli, 2015). Her assertion is supported by historians Rossella Ropa and Cinzia Venturoli who state, 'fra le lavoratrici agricole, la figura più idealizzata, più stereotipata e più presente nel sistema produttivo agricolo era la *mondina*' (Ropa & Venturoli, 2010, p. 155). As Barbara Imbergamo notes, the 1950s rhetoric around the *mondina* assumed an intensely political character: 'di punto in bianco divenne consuetudine rievocare gli episodi di combattività di cui le mondine erano state protagoniste e identificarle *tout court* come donne combattive e coscienti, di Sinistra e antifasciste' (Imbergamo, 2003-2004, p. 219). This chapter analyses oral histories from a number of different sources, including two research projects, one by Gavioli (1999), and the other by Cristina Ghirardini and Sussana Venturi (2011), and three documentaries, *Il Maggio delle mondine* (Marano, 2001), *Sorriso amaro* (Bellizzi, 2003), and *Di madre in figlia* (Zambelli, 2008). As well as providing contemporary evidence for the instrumentalisation of the figure of the *mondina*, this chapter asks why recollections of the *mondine* are so prevalent in both cultural and collective memory. The chapter also, within its limits, aims to fill in aspects of the *mondine*'s identities which have been sacrificed to political symbolism. Research on the *mondine* is important because it both bolsters the canon of literature which reveals women's contributions to postwar Italy, and interrogates features of their commemoration to ask why and how society remembers working women.

To explain the *mondine*'s legacy we should look to both historical and gender discourse in post-World War Two Italy. Particularly in the context of the Cold War and the anticommunism which dominated the West, for the Italian left 'il recupero di quegli eventi di lotta, la loro enfaticizzazione, [e] la costruzione di un discorso politico sulle mondine si iscrivevano in una più generale tendenza all'individuazione di categorie di lavoratori "ideali"' (Imbergamo, 2003-2004, p. 220). In gender terms too, Chapter 1 showed how female figures were instrumentalised to symbolise national rebirth and divert the guilt and defeat associated with the Italian male (Gundle, 1999, p. 378). This chapter examines to what extent the *mondine* themselves have internalised notions of the ideal worker and nationhood and express them in memory. There is a continuity here with Chapter 1: perhaps even more than filmic representations, oral histories of *mondine* portray women as 'cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the

collectivity's "honour" and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 67), with a distinct left-wing twist which suits both contemporary and post-World War Two sensibilities.

This chapter first addresses the unique value of an oral history and memory studies approach to the *mondine*, then examines how the *mondine* inscribe themselves within left-wing discourse, touching on their memories of political engagement and solidarity. The chapter concludes with a close analysis of the commemoration of Maria Margotti, suggesting how it exemplifies the *mondine*'s symbolism of the left-wing.

The corpus

This chapter examines oral history interviews gathered from a number of different sources. All the interviewees included here worked as *mondine* in the period between 1945 and 1965. Interviewees originate from Italy's northern 'rice belt'. The most substantial body of eleven of interviews was collected with *mondine* from Filo, a historic rice-growing area in the province of Ferrara. The interviews were conducted in 1999 by Gavioli for her chapter in the book *Le donne, le lotte, la memoria 1949-1999 a cinquant'anni della morte di Maria Margotti* (Zagagnoni, 1999). The original transcripts of these interviews were given to me by Gavioli herself at the UDI (Unione delle donne italiane) office in Ferrara. The interviews are conducted either with individuals or with groups, most of whom sing in the 'Coro delle mondine di Filo "Maria Margotti"'. This variety of individual and group interviews presents challenges and differences which will be discussed in the section on collective memory. Similarly, the music scholar Cristina Ghirardini gave me access to her recorded group interviews with *mondine*, collected in 2009 as part of her research on two *mondine* choirs in Medicina (Bologna) and Lavezzola (Ravenna). Those interviews were captured *in situ* in the rice fields, with the *mondine* describing their surroundings and memories of their work. Both of these collections present the challenge of not having conducted the interviews myself. This being the case, I cannot assert with authority how much interviewees knew of interviewers' specific research interests. Particularly in the case of Gavioli, it seems likely that interviewees were aware of the project's focus on Margotti. I also include excerpts from some interviews with *mondine* conducted by Angela Verzelli and Paola Zappaterra for their book *La vita, il lavoro, le lotte: Le mondine di Medicina negli anni Cinquanta* (2001).

Providing both oral history and evidence of cultural memory are the recent documentaries I study. These are *Il maggio delle mondine* (2001), *Sorriso amaro* (2003), and *Di madre in figlia* (2008).⁷⁵ Like the oral history projects of Gavioli and Ghirardini, these documentaries give a contemporary perspective on the *mondine*'s lives. I chose to include documentaries in my corpus because they act as a bridge between oral

⁷⁵ *Il maggio delle mondine* was filmed by Francesco Marano at the request of Cristina Ghirardini and Susanna Venturi as part of their aforementioned project (2011).

testimony and film, combining spontaneous production from interviewees and edited selection from filmmakers. In this chapter I analyse the documentaries predominantly for their oral histories, but am mindful of the filming and editing processes which differentiate documentary from my other interviews. All three documentarists declare a common goal in their studies to 'recuperare il passato' (Bellizzi, 2005), expressing an explicit desire to commemorate. The filming methods employed reflect the desire to simulate natural conversations sometimes by silently observing interaction between documentees. As such, they fall within the 'Interactive Mode' of documentary, in which 'the film maker need not be only a cinematic, recording eye. He or she might more fully approximate the human sensorium: looking, listening, and speaking as it perceives events and allows for response' (Nichols, 1992, p. 44). More often in the documentaries, there is what documentary theorist Bill Nichols calls a 'pseudomonologue' (Nichols, 1992, p. 54), in which the interviewer and his questions are masked and the interviewee almost directly addresses the camera. If it is true that 'pseudomonologue appears to deliver the thoughts, impressions, feelings, and memories of the individual witness directly to the viewer' (Nichols, 1992, p. 54), then I would argue that the documentaries seek to set up an illusion that what they show are authentic and spontaneous instances of historical recollection. Ultimately, however, the intrusion and transformative process of documentary is undeniable. Of his collaboration with Ghirardini and Venturi, film maker Francesco Marano highlights how even the best-defined of ethnographic intentions cannot erase the 'impossibilità di render[si] invisibile' (Ghirardini & Venturi, 2011, p. 151). This is further reason to approach testimony in the documentaries as cultural memory, rather than historical reality.

Film	Date	Sponsors/Affiliations
Sorriso amaro	2003	CGIL Marche, Programma Media Unione Europea, Film Commission Torino, Piemonte Emilia Romagna Film Commission, Regione Piemonte Comune di Nonantola, Comune di Vercelli
Le Acque dell'anima	2005	Regione Emilia Romagna, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Bologna, Provincia di Bologna
Di Madre in figlia	2008	Piemonte Doc Film Fund, Programma Media Unione Europea, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio Modena: (50,000 euros), Provincia di Modena.
Il Maggio delle mondine	2011	None stated – 'Il film l'ho autofinanziato, non sono stato pagato per nulla e non ho mai guadagnato un centesimo' (Marano, 2018).

Figure 16 List of the documentaries' sponsors and affiliations

Mondine, Memory, & Oral History

The interviews analysed here are examples of collective memory. We can observe that Halbwachs' emphasis on interaction in collective memory – 'it is individuals as group members who remember' (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 46) – is immediately identifiable in the interviews and documentary testimonies. In all the sources presented here the *mondine* provide evidence of being an interactive social group who often share and discuss memories. Indeed, Ghirardini told me that, should I want to interview the *mondine* of

Ravenna, I need only go to a certain café on a certain day and I would find them reminiscing, as they do weekly. Such anecdotal evidence is supported by the documentary *Sorriso amaro*, which shows a group of ex *mondine* gathered in someone's home to watch *Riso amaro* and discuss their comments and memories. Individual and group memories also interact with cultural materials in what Astrid Erll calls premediation and remediation.⁷⁶ The interaction between real-world behaviour and representations has already been noted in Chapter 1 in relation to the *mondine*'s increased wearing of shorts 'alla Mangano' (Lucia Motti in Imbergamo, 2014, 155) after the release of *Riso amaro*. This interaction of collective and cultural memory is bi-directional; in Matteo Bellizzi's documentary, one *mondina* recounts how she was an extra in *Riso amaro*. She recalls that when she showed Silvana Mangano how to perform rice weeding, Mangano exclaimed, 'sempre così per otto ore? Io neanche per un milione al giorno farei questo lavoro massacrante' (*Sorriso amaro*, 2003). This evidence highlights how collective and cultural memory are co-creations.

Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (1998, p. 66) include observations about the intermingling of cultural, collective, and individual memory in oral history. We can observe this in the specific case of the *mondine*; their various cultural representations have already been presented in the introduction to this section. Interviewees recall press attention, saying 'il nostro primo lavoro è stata la risaia. Allora è venuta una giornalista da me [...]. Qui ci hanno ritratto sul ponte dov'eravamo a lavorare' (Zagatti, et al., 1998). We can recall the intense mediation of the *mondine* from Gavioli's statement about the stereotypes regarding the *mondine* (Gavioli, 2015). This commemoration and process of re-/pre-mediation reinforces the value of my sources as an opportunity to analyse how memory builds and shapes the figure of the *mondina* over time and across different media.

Unlike the interviews in Chapters 4 and 6, those that I analyse here are not my own, and as such are treated especially critically. This is supported by work on interview theory that underlines how the interview process transforms the production of memory and historical reality. Nichols reminds us that 'interviews are a form of hierarchical discourse deriving from the unequal distribution of power, as in the confessional and the interrogation' (Nichols, 1992, p. 47). Historian Primo Levi warns of the 'realities' eyewitnesses describe, since 'an eyewitness is neither a historian nor a philosopher' (Levi, 1989, p. 122). According to these arguments, and my own lack of knowledge about the relationships between interviewees and interviewers, I cannot vouch for how spontaneously or independently interviewees produce testimony. However, I would argue that the diversity of researchers and research focuses in this corpus of oral histories minimises the likelihood of unrepresentative bias. This being said, the underlying philosophy of this project is that interviews allow an understanding of how reality and identity are constructed, rather than giving us access to unmediated historical reality.

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, my choice to examine cultural and collective memory

⁷⁶ Erll notes that 'memorable events are usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media [...]. What is known about a[n] [...] event which has been turned into a site of memory, therefore, seems to refer not so much to what one might cautiously call the "actual events", but instead to a canon of existent medial constructions' (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 392).

and oral histories of working women is politically motivated. The last *mondine* were young in the 1940s; we can expect the opportunity to gather their memories to expire within the next few decades. As already noted, oral histories and their study have made the creation of the archive accessible to subaltern classes and brought out their voices. The *mondine* span a number of 'silenced' groups: illiterate, working class, female.

Women of the Left

The strongest currents of memory, both in these sources and in wider Italian society, evoke the left-wing identity of the *mondine*. This is hardly surprising: Laura Ruberto notes that when materials concerning the *mondine* appeared in the period between 1900 and 1965, they were often sponsored by political or trade union organisations (Ruberto, 2008, p. 49). The *mondine* were celebrated for their participation in the Resistance, both in press and politics, with Senator Cino Moscatelli recalling how 'più di una di esse ha saputo non solo affrontare la morte in combattimento, ma anche il sacrificio di fronte al plotone di esecuzione: e caddero a testa alta gridando il loro ideale sociale e patriottico' (Imbergamo, 2003-2004, p. 220).⁷⁷ Even before the war, the *mondine* were somewhat distanced from Fascist rhetoric, partly because women of middle or upper classes 'had far more exposure than working-class or peasant girls and women' (Willson, 2010, p. 64). This is supported by the fact the *mondine* were one of the few groups that undertook successful strikes under Fascism (Pojmann, 2013, p. 21). Indeed, 'numerosi furono, infine, i provvedimenti che il regime fascista prese in quegli anni verso le mondine anche grazie alle proteste e agli scioperi' (Ropa & Venturoli, 2010, p. 156).⁷⁸ As well as their participation in the Resistance, the *mondine* actively contrasted Fascist and Nazi interests through civil resistance. The summer of 1944 saw the 'diserzione massiccia dalle risaie' as the *mondine* refused to provide food for Fascist or Nazi occupying forces (Imbergamo, 2003-2004, p. 216).

Even before either the First or Second World War, the *mondine* had strong associations with the left. From the early 1900s and the Turin labour movement of the 1920s there was widespread adherence of industrial workers to left-wing parties, and this was particularly prominent in the North where the *mondine* were working. Although the *mondine* were not a formalised political group, they were certainly politicised. They had their own newspapers *La risaia*, *Mondariso*, and *Risaiola*, and frequently belonged to political organisations like the UDI, the PCI, the PSI, and other civic working-class institutions like the *Casa del*

⁷⁷ Vincenzo 'Cino' Moscatelli was a partisan and was later elected as a deputy to the *Assemblea costituente* of 1946.

⁷⁸ Specifically, 'Nel 1933 fu concessa la riduzione del 75 per cento del prezzo del viaggio per le mondine che dovevano spostarsi verso le risaie fuori dalla regione, nel 1935 venne stabilito che le mondine dovessero avere a disposizione una branda per la notte. Nel 1936 le spese per il viaggio furono addebitate ai proprietari e i trasporti venivano ora effettuati con vagoni passeggeri e non più su carri bestiame; nel 1937 furono pagate in più le ore straordinarie e le ore festive e il vitto migliorò' (Ropa & Venturoli, 2010, p. 156).

popolo.⁷⁹ They had particular links with the Socialist party which was formed in the 1890s, and were a key focus of the party's support of agricultural workers (Zappi, 1991, p. 77). Socialist organisation of the *mondine* was, in some regions more than others, highly sophisticated, with leagues and socialist leaders at the helm, 'none of whom were women' (Zappi, 1991, p. 89). We can see, therefore, that the *mondine*'s connection to the Left is historical. In the post-World War Two context, these historical allegiances became all the more important because, as Willson notes, 'in this period of strong political sub-cultures, party membership was often an all-embracing social identity, shared by [...] whole communities' (Willson, 2010, p. 130). I argue that this all-embracing identity emerges clearly from my sources, where class, political, and historical identities converge.

Having established the link between the *mondine* and the Left, it is useful to observe the Left's discourse around women's emancipation at this time. Although both DC and PCI 'embraced female suffrage and created mass women's organisations' (Willson, 2010, p. 129), it was the PCI that 'spoke frequently of rights and officially supported "women's emancipation"' (Willson, 2010, p. 131). According to Willson, Palmiro Togliatti saw female suffrage as an integral part of the modernisation and renewal of Italy, stating, in 1945, that "Italian democracy needs women and women need democracy" (Willson, 2010, p. 134), a fact which is supported by famous partisan and later PCI deputy Teresa Noce's reminiscences of Togliatti doing the washing up when he came for dinner (Noce, 1977). Historian Dolores Negrello records how Party Secretary Giuseppe Gaddi 'sollecita anche con forza una maggiore presenza femminile' (Negrello, 2000, p. 92) at the 1947 meeting of the PCI section of Padua. In the 1946 elections, out of a total 226 female candidates for the Constituent Assembly, the PCI had the greatest number at 68 (the closest party to this being the DC at just 29 female candidates) (Pojmann, 2013, p. 34). Beyond the Italian party system, it is useful to remember the global scene upon which Soviet communism was unfolding. Italian left-wing women's organisation UDI 'tended to view communist states, especially the Soviet Union, as open to women's emancipation, and they pointed to careers and opportunities in Russia that women in Italy did not have access to' (Pojmann, 2013, p. 4). We can see then, that left-wing discourse about female participation and emancipation was not only stronger perhaps than that of other parties, but evidently had an impact on female political engagement. The *mondine* were unique even amongst the female presence of the Left; as Negrello points out, in the context of low female participation in the Padova section of the PCI in 1947, 'pressoché nullo risulta l'impegno tra le lavoratrici dei campi, ad eccezione [...] delle mondine' (Negrello, 2000, pp. 92-93). The *mondine* are said to have found in left-wing politics 'una struttura praticabile di emancipazione e di riscatto' (Castelli, et al., 2005, p. 4).

The *mondine* are a group that has adhered to and internalised left-wing allegiance, and this fact is evident in the oral histories studied here. The first indication of left-wing consciousness in the interviews

⁷⁹ In my research I have come across a number of titles, not all of them consultable, such as *Mondariso* (one example of which is available at the Istituto Gramsci in Bologna), as well *La Risaia* which is widely referenced and quoted in Imbergamo's 2014 work. Ropa and Venturoli (2010, p. 73) also mention "*La Risaia*" pubblicato a Lodi (1919) in cui comparivano notizie prevalentemente sindacali ed informazioni legali sui diritti delle mondine'.

can be found in the *mondine*'s identification with a subaltern class. Their descriptions of class are shot through with left-wing discourse which, through figures like Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and Palmiro Togliatti, propounded notions of social stratification, of cultural hegemony through a dominant class, and revolution through a subaltern, working class. It is useful to note the vocabulary referring to class in Italian, and in the interviews. Italian frequently uses the terms *operai* and *proletariato* to describe what we might broadly equate to 'manual labourers', 'proletariat' or 'working class'. The *mondine* often self-describe using terms like *braccianti* and *contadini*, which although they strictly refer to a rural, agricultural class of worker carry equal weight as descriptors of a subaltern class or proletariat. In interviews, the *mondine* seem to achieve a specific status within these class descriptors, by describing themselves most frequently as *mondine* rather than *braccianti*. Considering that the role of *mondina* is seasonal, and probably accounted for no more than a hundred total days of work per year, it would be more accurate for these women to describe themselves as part of a wider working or agricultural class. Yet, Ghirardini observes that 'se hanno lavorato, anche solo per poche stagioni, in risaia, continuano a definirsi sempre come "mondine"' (Ghirardini & Venturi, 2011, pp. 24-25). We might suggest that such a production of an autonomous identity is the fruit of years of commemoration of the *mondine*. Both the left-wing commemoration which Imbergamo describes as resulting in the tendency to 'identificarle *tout court* come donne combattive e coscienti, di Sinistra e antifasciste' (Imbergamo, 2003-2004, p. 219), and cultural representations of the *mondine* such as the immensely successful *Riso amaro* (1949) may have contributed to their recourse to the term *mondina* in oral histories. If this is the case, it exemplifies how subjects remediate their own memories and identities.

Interviewees make other, more explicit, identifications with the political Left in their testimonies. Left-wing thinkers such as Togliatti and Gramsci are mentioned frequently in interviews. It is interesting to interrogate how these references are made. Joelle De Lacroix notes that during World War Two the 'mondine se heurtent violement aux carabiniers et à la milice fasciste en criant les noms du Gramsci, Terrani, Scorcimano, Romeda, Flecchia, Negarville, etc.' (De Lacroix, 1971, p. 154), linking their anti-state action with these left-wing political figures. Such a notion is reinforced by an interviewee who recalls one reverse strike, illegally weeding with her mother when the police arrived in the rice fields. Her mother insisted on negotiating with the officers, and when she successfully saw them off she said to her colleagues, 'avete visto? Non mi volete mai dare retta ma io sono la sorella di Togliatti, quello che ha in testa Togliatti ce l'ho anche io, datemi retta!' (Verzelli & Zappaterra, 2001, p. 23). Interviewees in the documentaries also make reference to left-wing figures. As she looks around an abandoned *caserma*, one documentary interviewee begins singing, 'e con De Gasperi non si va, non si va'. At this point her companions specifically request the refrain which she subsequently sings: 'perché è amico dei preti e dei signori, che gli venisse un cancro / vogliamo Togliatti, capo del lavoro' (Di madre in figlia, 2008). In its fame and popularity with the interviewees, this song testifies to the left-wing identity of the *mondine* working in the postwar era. The song makes clear their dissociation from the state, forces of order, the DC, the Church, and the upper

classes. Togliatti – ‘capo del lavoro’ – is symbolic of subaltern and peasant victory. We should not forget that, as Millicent Marcus notes, in the postwar period ‘a national victory for the Left [was] something not totally unthinkable’ (Marcus, 2000, p. 337), and the power of the Left was reinforced by the ‘intellectual magnetism’ (Broghi, 2011, p. 13) of leaders like Gramsci and Togliatti. The *mondine* here support the argument that the ‘intellectual sophistication of founding leaders such as Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti had not isolated the party from the masses; in fact it more frequently allowed it to exert an effective control of its rank and file’ (Broghi, 2011, p. 15).

Interviewees in Gavioli’s project also make reference to left-wing figures, producing striking examples of memories which have become distorted over time. In these interviews, participants incorrectly recall that after Margotti’s assassination, her orphaned children were adopted by left-wing leaders. In one group interview, several *mondine* confidently assert, ‘le figlie le volevano mettere a posto per bene, perché una la prendeva Togliatti e l’altra la prendeva [Giuliana] Nenni’ (Zagatti, et al., 1998). Margotti’s daughter herself says, ‘ce ne sono tanti che pensano che siamo state una con Togliatti’ (Baldini & Siroli, 1998). Five of Gavioli’s eleven interviews make reference to Togliatti and socialist deputy Giuliana Nenni, and several also mention the communist Rita Montagnana in relation to Margotti’s funeral. This may be another inaccuracy of memory, as there is evidence of these figures attending a commemoration event for Margotti, but only anecdotal evidence that they attended the funeral itself.



Figure 17 Rita Montagnara, Giuliana Nenni, and Palmiro Togliatti at unnamed event in commemoration of Margotti
https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2022069/10978_A1CA7BB7_53F6_4631_A617_F2FB8FA8D4A0.html?q=what%3A%22Margotti+Maria%22 [Accessed 14/02/2018]

Another interviewee expresses the – perhaps distasteful – excitement that the alleged presence of famous left-wing figures caused at the funeral, exclaiming ‘c’era la Giuliana Nenni, la figlia di Nenni, e la Rita Montagnana, l’allora moglie di Togliatti. E mi ricordo che sono venuti giù, ed è stata una cosa grandissima, abbiamo anche le foto’ (Biavati & Biavati, 1999). These statements show the important symbolic value left-wing figures such as these had for the *mondine* and the desire to foreground this in memory, sometimes at the cost of truth or sensitivity.

Miseria

The concept of *miseria* has already been touched on in Chapter 1, and appears again in interviews. This concept, roughly translatable as poverty or hardship is a prominent feature of discourse around the *mondine*, but also around the left-wing working class at this time. The emphasis on *miseria* is a way in which interviewees express dedication to work and a sense of class belonging. Like the discussion of representations of the *mondine* as *popolane* in Chapter 1, references to *miseria* evoke ideas of the good peasant. Jacqueline Ellis argues in her work on working-class women in the US that during the period in question there was much rhetoric of ‘agrarian sentimentality, and moral stoicism in the face of hard times’ (Ellis, 1998, p. 27), and I would argue that the same is true of Italy. Paola Bonifazio contends that foregrounding ‘the imperative of work, as both a right and a duty for each citizen, and the transition from Fascism to democracy was represented as a conversion from warfare to workfare’ (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 32). Recalling that the 1946 Italian Constitution opens with the declaration that ‘l’Italia è una Repubblica democratica, fondata sul lavoro’ (Assemblea Costituente, 1946), to be an assiduous and resilient worker represented a distance from Fascism and a commitment to the rebuilding of the postwar nation. The same primacy of work is referred to frequently in the interviews. One *mondina* remembers, ‘io mi sono sposata il sabato, lunedì sono venuta a mietere il riso’ (Beccari, et al., 2009). Another states, ‘se io muoio per il lavoro sono contenta’ (Zagatti, et al., 1998). These comments are remarkable for highlighting the sacrifice – be it personal or political – which the *mondine* are willing to make. If, according to Bonifazio’s theory, to prioritise work is to symbolise anti-fascist and postwar rebirth, the *mondine* narrate themselves as those idealised wartime characters, the *Italiani brava gente*. Historian Silvana Patriarca has described this as the notion that Italians were ‘a good, humane people, basically untainted by fascism’ (Patriarca, 2010, p. 189). This reinforces my argument that interviewees echo the ‘postwar cultural production in Italy [...] [which] served fantasmatic and even mythopoetic ends’ (Alsop, 2014, p. 28).

The work to which these women were expressing such commitment was extremely physically demanding. Yet, recollections of physical hardship or illness among the *mondine* are notably scarce in the sources. Apart from the obvious effort of pulling weeds out of flooded fields under the sun for eight hours a day, the severity and variety of the maladies suffered by the *mondine* are extensive. In her chapter

dedicated to the lives of rice weeders, Eleonora Zappi enumerates the physical hardships of the *mondine*, from malnutrition to malaria to miscarriage. Senator Giuseppe Cortese stated of rice weeding in 1953, 'Dante non ha conosciuto il lavoro delle mondine; se l'avesse conosciuto lo avrebbe descritto come pena in qualche girone dell'inferno per gli agricoltori' (Cortese, 1953, p. 40429). Other sources, such as the leaflet 'Mondine, difendetevi dai pericoli!', produced by the Ente Nazionale Prevenzione Infortuni (1959) also attest to the ailments of the *mondine*, one of which was even called 'la malattia del riso'. The *mondine*'s health has also been historically overlooked; whether concerning laws to curb malaria, or providing adequate shelter for seasonal *mondine*, profit triumphed over welfare. Farmers were generally too mean to dispense unnecessary money and influential rice producers lobbied ministers and gave fault to the peasants' immoral lifestyles.⁸⁰ However, not only are references to hardship and illness rare in the sources, I argue that they are absorbed and reclaimed into the *miseria* of the 'agrarian sentimentality, and moral stoicism' (Ellis, 1998, p. 27) which is so central to the *mondine*'s oral histories.

In the entire body of interviews there are only two quotes referencing illness. One *mondina* reflects, 'le malattie c'erano anche loro eh? C'era il TBC [...] però chissà...' (Beccari, et al., 2009), and another says, 'noi eravamo del posto, avevamo le risaie si può dire accanto alla nostra casa [...] Ma queste povere donne che venivano di Modena, di Piacenza, di Ferrara, queste qui, facevano proprio una malattia' (Sorriso amaro, 2003).⁸¹ The latter testimony suggests that illness was merely a result of not being used to life in the rice-growing areas. The physical toll of the work is also downplayed by interviewees who say, 'adesso a pensarci era faticoso, però a pensarci adesso, memorizzare è anche bello [...] sì, era faticoso anche quello lì, però non era come in campagna, andare a zappare' (Beccari, et al., 2009). Others still normalise the physical price of labour, stating, 'sì, lavorare è fatica. Dicono, adesso, che lavorano tanto [...]. Noi abbiamo fatto tanta fatica. Adesso si lamentano lo stesso, è diventata un'abitudine' (Zagatti, et al., 1998). Hardship and resilience in work is reclaimed by interviewees in a sense of geographical, historical, or generational belonging, consolidating their identities. This fact is particularly striking when compared to the graphic and frequent descriptions of physical pain inflicted on the *mondine* by police during their industrial action (discussed below). Accounts of hardship romanticise or dismiss certain elements of working-class existence. *Miseria* is reframed as an acceptable part of the effort for postwar rebirth, supporting Bonifazio's comment that 'the imperative of work [...] was represented as a conversion from warfare to workfare' (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 32). The portrayal of the *mondine* as a resilient workforce in oral histories also presents a counterpoint to the ailing bodies of the *mondine* we see in *Riso amaro* (1949) and *La risaia* (1956), and to the idea of female workers occupying traditionally feminised, 'safe' domestic roles.

The other face of *miseria* is its strong connections with the land, the rural and the agricultural, recalling the 'agrarian sentimentality' (Ellis, 1998, p. 27) which Ellis references. The *mondine* frequently

⁸⁰ I am thinking particularly of the *Inchiesta Jacini* conducted in 1880. Zappi quotes the report as attributing the ills of the peasant class to their 'absolute lack of moral instruction' (Zappi, 1991, p. 38).

⁸¹ There may be some scientific accuracy to this statement, as citizens who lived in proximity to the rice fields were likely to have developed greater resistance to malaria, to name but one illness which prospered in the rice fields.

reference their dependence on the land, saying ‘non c'era niente, di risorse, la mietitura e la mondariso, la monda, la monda e la mietitura’ (Sorriso amaro, 2003). Others comment, ‘noi eravamo mondine ma anche braccianti, non solo mondine, lavoravamo anche all'asciutta, a zappare le barbietole a mietere il grano, nella cipolla’ (Zini & Sangiorgi, 2009), and, ‘noi eravamo contadini, eravamo operai, in valle e in campagna’ (Trombetti & Fortini, 1999). Identification with land and place in Italy is complex and an established cultural trope. In the specific case of the *mondine*, references to the land not only reinforce class connections, but interact with the symbolic figure of the woman and the rebirth of a contemporary nation. Identification of the *mondine* with the land recalls Stephen Gundle’s comments on Silvana in *Riso amaro* as ‘a creature of the earth’ (Gundle, 2007, p. 145), and Nira Yuval-Davis’ assertion of the ‘close association between collective territory collective identity and womanhood’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 45). The female figure given symbolic responsibility for the birth of the nation under Fascism was the rural *massaia*.⁸² In the postwar period, there is still a notable use of female rural figures to represent the nation. The *mondine*’s associations with the land reinforce a discourse of restoration of the nation through rural female labour.

The *mondine*’s highly class-bound identity can also be found in accounts of conflict with their wider communities. One *mondina* remembers the reaction of a farmer’s wife to one of their strikes, recalling ‘arriva fuori la moglie, che era *una professoressa*, tutta arrabbiata e cominciò ad offenderci; “branco di puttane, se avete fatto figli manteneteveli!” [my emphasis] (Verzelli & Zappaterra, 2001, p. 46). Another *mondina* recounts a similar incident during a protest:

Venne una donna alta così e cominciò a dire: ‘Adesso vi faccio ammazzare perché a causa vostra è stata ferita mia madre!’. Io le risposi che personalmente non avevo nessuna arma [...] ma lei continuava a gridare ‘Ammazzàtela, ammazzàtela che è una nostra avversaria!’. Forse era *quella che aveva i crumiri a lavorare* [my emphasis] (Ghirardini & Zagatti, 1998).

Another interviewee recounts an incident from a protest, saying ‘m’accorgo che una signora, vicino a me, che *era una signora della casa*, [...] vedo che sanguina da un braccio: ho capito che non sparavano per aria. [...] La signora, vedi, ha cominciato a offendermi, a dirmi di tutto’ [my emphasis] (Biavati & Biavati, 1999). These recollections build an image of the *mondine* at odds with the wider community. Significantly, the adversaries in these stories are all described in terms which differentiate their class. These descriptions echo Gramsci’s subversive practise, which he describes as ‘una posizione negativa e non positiva di classe: il “popolo” sente che ha dei nemici e li individua solo empiricamente nei così detti signori’ (Gramsci, 1975, p. 17). By describing conflict with individuals of superior capital or education the *mondine* consolidate their difference as working-class women and echo some of the class warfare in left-wing discourse at this time.

⁸² The *Massaie rurali* ‘lay at the heart of a number of Fascist campaigns, particularly those concerned with gender roles, ruralisation, demography’ (Willson, 2002, p. 3).

In these stories, the *mondine* represent themselves as honest workers resisting an unfair and oppressive bourgeoisie and its associated values.

Solidarity

Conflict with those external to the *mondine* is recounted against a background of internal solidarity. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the defining features of the oral sources is discourse around solidarity. Statements such as: ‘eravamo tutte come sorelle’ (Trombetti & Fortini, 1999), and ‘la vita non è stata facile, però siamo state anche bene insieme, perché ci volevamo bene’ (Zagatti, et al., 1998) are typical. Anecdotes of solidarity abound. One of the most endearing recalls how a certain *mondina* at the age of fifteen stashed her money in a box in the *caserma* while she worked:

Quando sono arrivata dalla risaia, a mezzogiorno, il primo pensiero era di guardare dentro perché sapevo che avevo ventisei lire. Apro, guardo nel borsellino, vedo che mi avevano tolto venticinque lire [...]. Il bello era questo poi [...] io seduta, sul letto seduta lì, passavano [le altre mondine], mettevano qualche soldino – ho quasi racimolato i miei soldi che mi avevano preso. Eh, la solidarietà c'era, c'era (Di madre in figlia, 2008).

Comments such as these foreground the primacy of postwar discourse around solidarity (Ginsborg, 2001, p. 153). Gavioli notes that among the *mondine*, ‘gli intrecci tra le memorie sono evidenti nel ricorso simultaneo alla prima persona singolare, quando parla l’“io”, ed a quella plurale, in cui è “noi” a prevalere’ (Gavioli, 1999, p. 104). These testimonies show how the *mondine* blend their individual identities and memories with the collective, advocating for it as empowering. As in Chapter 1, representations and recollections of the *mondine*’s solidarity reinforce ideas of women as ‘embodiments of the collectivity’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 23).

Solidarity is also characterised by a sense of local geographical belonging. This is made explicit in observations like, ‘centri come qui che non ci si vuole male, ci si vuole abbastanza bene, perché noi abbiamo un paese [...] abbastanza unito’ (Zagatti, et al., 1998). The *mondine* again evoke the image of the woman linked to locality and land, and thus echo constructions of women as ‘embodiments of the collectivity’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 23). Collaboration was part of Gramsci’s vision of *autocoscienza*; when workers of the same sector ‘[si] sente di dover essere solidale con un altro [dello stesso settore]’ (Gramsci, 2014, p. XXX). The *mondine*’s memories of solidarity link their identity to the local.

Accounts of solidarity are also prominent in descriptions of the *mondine*’s industrial action, which is discussed in greater detail below. When asked how women behaved during strikes, several *mondine* reply

‘erano tutte unite. [...] [In confronto agli uomini] le donne erano sempre più unite. Partecipavano a tutto’ (Ghirardini & Zagatti, 1998). Interviewees stipulate that, ‘anche quando è morta Maria Margotti siamo andate tutte quante’ (Trombetti and Fortini, 1999). Closer reading of these citations reveals the insistence on the feminine plural forms, again reinforcing the idea of uniquely female collective action and determination even in the face of murder. It is suggested that protests provided an opportunity for a kind of solidarity which gave space to – momentarily - overturn gender norms. Interviewees highlight that, ‘se c'erano gli scioperi gli uomini li mettevano subito in prigione, invece noi donne ci tolleravano di più [...] le donne stanno sempre davanti [...] è l'unico momento, in cui mettono davanti le donne’ (Trombetti & Fortini, 1999). Interviewees highlighted that men and women had the same political goals, ‘per la famiglia, sempre per prendere un soldo in più’ (Trombetti & Fortini, 1999), echoing the notion that ‘Communists still saw emancipation as essentially an economic question’ (Morris, 2006b, p. 131) which transcended gender. These extraordinary testimonies of commitment and organisation in industrial action reflect Gramsci's belief that ‘only through [...] organisation and discipline [...] can a “subaltern” class achieve its goals’ (Cammet, 1967, p. 194). As well as organisation of action, Gramsci defined ‘discipline’ as adherence to a party, another feature which was very notable of the *mondine* as a social group. The political engagement of the *mondine* is evident in testimony and historical literature, and confirmed by evidence such as the 28 June 1951 Piedmontese edition of *L'Unità*, interviewing *mondine* about the election. The interviewee and representative of the *mondine* describes how ‘ci avevano promesso i treni speciali per andare a votare e non ci hanno dato niente. [...] Sapevano a chi avremo dato il voto, noi mondine, e ci hanno fatto fare chilometri e chilometri a piedi’ (Anon., 28 June 1951). Such statements suggest the collective identity which *mondine* felt as political body and electorate.

A final example of solidarity which the *mondine* frequently evoke are the cooperatives. These cooperatives were areas of farmland purchased by local *braccianti* themselves (in my interviewees’ case in the early 1950s) and made into organisations which managed and divided work and profit between the peasant stakeholders. One *mondina* explains how they ran the cooperatives as a form of social justice. After Margotti’s daughters married, her cooperative ‘le ha pagato i mobili, le ha pagato tutto, perché erano rimaste sole’ (Biavati & Biavati, 1999). She also explains that as part of the cooperative ‘come sindacato davamo delle giornate in più a chi aveva bisogno, a tutte le vedove: non davano le giornate uguali a chi erano marito e moglie, che lavoravano tutti e due, davano delle giornate di più per le loro bambine’ (Biavati & Biavati, 1999). Another interviewee describes the acquisition of the cooperative as a triumph over the ruling classes, saying ‘quelle terre sono state tutte dalla nostra cooperativa. L’ultimo padrone a scappare è stato Tamba, ed è stata una bella lotta anche quella’ (Ghirardini & Zagatti, 1998). Here we can see evidence of Gramscian subversive action. The Gramscian philosophy of *autocoscienza* and collaboration is also shown to underpin the acquisition of the cooperatives in interviewees’ assertion that ‘allora si lasciavano giù delle ore di lavoro, anche del grano per aiutare le nostre organizzazioni [...] e abbiamo visto i frutti’ (Ghirardini & Zagatti, 1998). The cooperatives provide a concrete example of the *mondine*’s ‘close association between collective territory collective identity and womanhood’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 45).

Impegno

The *mondine's* activism was not simply a struggle for better pay or conditions. It had historical ties to left-wing politics, social and class identity, Resistance legacies, and anti-state and anti-Church sentiment. An anecdote that Negrello includes in her history of women from the Veneto includes one priest's recollection, 'io con la mia tonaca arrancavo sulla bicicletta, sudatissimo sotto il sole che picchiava forte. Una mondina mi vide arrivare [...] esclamò ad alta voce "mori, prete!" e io (risposi) "eh cara, ci manca poco...". [...] E c'era una forte presenza organizzata comunista' (Jori, 1990, p. 73). This recollection evidences the combative anti-establishment identity of the *mondine*.

Testimonies of the *mondine's* *impegno* draw on left-wing discourse and ideals to consolidate their identity in memory. Alessandro Broghi notes of the immediate postwar period that 'Communist anti-Americanism [...] remained carefully restrained and relatively muted [...] until the wartime Grand Alliance irretrievably broke down in the spring and summer of 1947' (Broghi, 2011, p. 13). Concurrently, Imbergamo observes that 'ancora nel 1945-47 sui periodici sono pochi i riferimenti alle mondine e, in quei pochi, esse non vengono presentate come una categoria dotata di particolari benemeritenze per la caduta del fascismo' (Imbergamo, 2003-2004, p. 218). It was from 1947, however, that the 'collaboration between the anti-Fascist parties, which started in 1943 in the CNL and was continued after the elections in 1946 with the tripartite formula, was definitely ended' (Mammarella, 1966, p. 147). The exclusion of the Left from government meant that Communist anti-state rhetoric was stepped up, and with it rose the star of the *mondine* in cultural memory; we can recall Imbergamo's assertion that from 1947 the *mondine* became renowned symbols of antifascism, and left-wing politicisation (Imbergamo, 2003-2004, p. 219). To what extent is the 'political battle with no holds barred' (Mammarella, 1966, p. 147) between centre (DC) and the Left (PCI/PSI) from 1947 onwards reflected in the *mondine's* testimonies? I note Imbergamo's argument that sometimes in left-wing discourse 'si rievocavano le lotte che i socialisti avevano fatto *per loro* e non *con loro*' (Imbergamo, 2014, p. 151) in relation to the *mondine*, and I deem it important to also use this section to reveal the political character of the *mondine's* activism (Rossi-Doria, 2000, p. 361).

As previously noted, the *mondine* have gained a legacy as key figures in the Resistance through interventions like those made in the Senate discussion of the 1953 draft law *Provvidenze a favore delle mondariso e dei loro bambini*. Senator Moscatelli recalled how, during the Resistance, the *mondine* 'caddero a testa alta gridando il loro ideale sociale e patriottico' (Imbergamo, 2003-2004, p. 220). Moscatelli's intervention also includes the false memory that the *mondine* protested arrests made of Communist leaders in 1927 by the *Tribunale speciale*, exemplifying the intensity of rhetoric around the *mondine* as anti-Fascists. The interviews support this. I do not wish to discredit the *mondine's* activism here, but to show how it has become framed within wider left-wing discourse and the myth of Patriarca's *Italiani, brava gente* (2010).

Interviewees highlight that Resistance participation was not just a struggle against a foreign

invader, but a matter of class warfare:

Vivevamo la nostra condizione con molta rabbia e la strada per la quale raggiungere una giustizia maggiore ci veniva dalla lotta di Liberazione, cioè *sentivamo che la lotta di Liberazione era da una parte contro i tedeschi e i fascisti ma, dall'altra, i partigiani portavano anche questa grande speranza a noi che eravamo così sfruttati e poveri*: quella di riscattarci [my emphasis] (Verzelli, 2000, p. 241).

Many of Gavioli's interviewees remember belonging to partisan groups, saying 'io ho sempre aiutato i partigiani' (Ghirardini & Zagatti, 1998), and 'io ne avevo cinque [partigiani] nascosti attorno a casa, e al mattino facevo finta di andare nei campi con una sporta e un forcone, gli portavo da mangiare' (Zagatti, et al., 1998). Interviewees often align themselves with left-wing politics through their families, stating, 'la nonna mi spiegava tutto, perché a sedici anni era capolega dei socialisti', and 'lo zio che poi lui l'hanno ammazzato, lui era tenente dei partigiani' (Biavati & Biavati, 1999). This sense of belonging to Resistance communities is about more than simple political views, but rather a communal identity and heritage in which Resistance ideas found resonance. Interviewees Alves and Fernanda make a statement which exemplifies the crossover of politics, heritage, and class identity for the *mondine*:

Le nostre nonne o le mamme ci hanno insegnato [...] le canzoni di partito e dei partigiani [...] Le nostre mamme le sapevano perché gliele aveva insegnate le nonne, e poi delle nuove ce n'erano perché c'è stata la guerra, ci sono stati i partigiani, [...] e *noi ce le siamo tirate dietro perché era il lavoro adatto per quelle canzoni lì* [my emphasis] (Zagatti, et al., 1998).

Alves and Fernanda highlight how the work of the *mondine* lent itself to the spirit of rebellion and resistance of the partisan identity, expressed in their song. The *mondine's* linkage of their Resistance activity and their families could be argued to displace partisan identity from the individual to the collective. Verzelli includes the testimony of one *mondina* whose husband was given 'la tessera da partigiano [ed] erano venuti per darla anche a me, però mio marito disse: "una, in casa, basta". E invece non è vero [...] Io non ho avuto la forza di dire: "la voglio anch'io"' (Verzelli, 2000, p. 244). In her study of the fictional *mondina*, Agnese, of Renata Viganò's 1949 *L'Agnese va a morire*, Laura Ruberto notes how in the Northern Liberation 'political conflict intertwines with the traditional class conflict; that is, the historical peasant struggle against the dominant culture mutates into the partisan peasants' struggle against fascism' (Ruberto, 1998, p. 332). Memories in the sources underline that sometimes women's individual identities were subsumed into communal narratives of Resistance participation, attributing it more to a class or a

(male) community, than to women themselves. This trend speaks to the wider 'serious omission [...] of women partisans [from] conventional histories of the Resistance' (Birnbaum, 1986, p. 49).

Supporting my thesis that the *mondine's* Resistance activism was about more than just the liberation of Italy from Nazi-Fascism, they continued their anti-state activity after the war's end. Military and police forces may no longer have been under Fascist control, but there is some suggestion that Fascists were recycled or maintained in the forces of order after the Liberation. Historian Jonathan Dunnage states that police 'institutions remained more or less intact at the community level' (Dunnage, 1999, p. 33) in the postwar period. Minister of the Interior Mario Scelba more than doubled the number of police forces between 1946 and 1947 and reinforced the militarized mobile battalions known as the *Celere* (Ginsborg, 2001, p. 148). The *Celere* were known for providing rapid-response discipline in potentially violent situations such as strikes or protests, and were famous for arriving on the scene in Nazi-Fascist-style Jeeps. As a result, even in the late 1940s and 1950s forces of order were still strongly associated by many – including the *mondine* – with Nazi-Fascism and its characteristic violence. One *mondina* elides the *Celere* and the SS in her memory of a protest, remembering, 'questa è una cosa che [non posso dimenticare] [...] e sì che sono cinquant'anni, però se ti devo spiegare-- c'era la SS, cioè la celere' (Bertuzzi, et al., 1999). Despite her insistence on the infallibility of her memory at fifty years distance from these events, this interviewee demonstrates an elision in memory between republican and Nazi-Fascist forces of order.

I would argue that memories which confuse Fascists and the police suggest that the *mondine's* activism was anti-establishment rather than specifically anti-Fascist in character. In the interviews the *mondine* express their hatred and mistrust of forces of order on multiple occasions and in manifold ways. One interviewee recounts, 'è arrivata la celere che ci ha picchiato [...] gli ho augurato tanti di quei cancheri!' (Trombetti & Fortini, 1999). Another advises, 'mai girare la schiena ai celerotti, guardatele sempre in faccia per vedere se vi danno delle pacche' (Ghirardini & Zagatti, 1998). This interviewee also highlighted her mistrust of the police by recounting how, after being arrested at a protest, 'a Molinella un capitano [...] ci offrì da bere ma io rifiutai di bere prima di vedere lui a farlo' (Ghirardini & Zagatti, 1998). Such sentiment and vocabulary (particularly the pejorative 'celerotti') betrays a deeply negative memory of relations with the police. This is hardly surprising, when we consider the weight of testimony of police violence. Recollections such as 'mi hanno picchiato quando facevamo sciopero in risaia' (Intervista collettiva, 2009), and 'abbiamo preso delle botte' (Trombetti & Fortini, 1999), demonstrate memory of police brutality. One particularly shocking testimony reads:

C'era una manifestazione di persone, stavamo andando a casa, mi ha preso la celere, che io non c'entravo a quell'ora [...]. Mi hanno dato tante botte che credevo proprio di perdere il bambino perché ero in stato interessante [incinta] sai (Di madre in figlia, 2008).

Testimonies of police violence and the *mondine*'s anti-state activism, mingled with statements of left-wing and partisan identity, support Broghi's argument that left-wing parties 'could work as magnets for all sorts of discontent' (Broghi, 2011, p. 8). Historians Franco Castelli et al. observe that the *mondine* 'trovarono infine nel socialismo un'ideologia forte e nelle organizzazioni sociali contadine una struttura praticabile di emancipazione e di riscatto' (Castelli, et al., 2005, p. 4). Accounts of the *mondine*'s anti-state activism also contrast Patrizia Gabrielli's statement that in Resistance narratives 'la donna veste i panni dell'essere non violento, [assolvendo dunque] la posizione delle donne' (Gabrielli, 2007, p. 20). The *mondine*'s refusal to inhabit this identity marks them out as unique in postwar discourse.

Another way in which the *mondine* demonstrate close ties to left-wing ideology is through their intellectual activism – rarely celebrated in cultural memory and scholarly enquiry of the *mondine*. Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual has already been introduced in Chapter 1 in relation to the characters of Francesca of *Riso amaro* (1949) and Elena in *La risaia* (1956). Organic intellectuals are, according to Gramsci, members of a subaltern class who become leaders of that class through 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, permanent persuader and not just a simple orator' (Gramsci, 1978, p. 10). Marcia Landy notes that organic intellectuals have 'a critical consciousness of the world, a desire to question and to change existing conditions, and a sense of collectivity with others in working to restructure society' (Landy, 1994, p. 30). The fact of being female, working class, and young during wartime were all barriers to the *mondine*'s education. Perry Willson notes that in early twentieth-century Italy, 'post-primary female education was considered [...] problematic' (Willson, 2010, p. 79). Beyond basic literacy, intellectual activity was not the norm for women, particularly those from the working classes, for whose families education removed one salary from the domestic economy. The example of interviewee and *mondina* Paola Brandolini, who 'frequenta la scuola fino alla terza elementare e pur essendo molto brava [...] sarà costretta ad interrompere il proprio percorso scolastico perché deve "accudire i fratelli e la casa"' (Archivio Storico Udi di Ferrara, 2014, p. 23), is representative of many female workers at this time. In their research on women's work, Ropa and Venturoli comment on an anonymous letter written to Mussolini, saying 'non era [...] una mondina, visto che queste non potevano certamente avere l'istruzione per scrivere in quel modo' (Ropa & Venturoli, 2010, p. 138). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 6, education was badly disrupted by the war, and access to schooling was often impossible. As a result, the *mondine* often sacrificed education early, leading to widespread illiteracy. Yet, not only do the oral histories show that the *mondine* were intellectually active, they also portray the *mondine* as fitting Gramsci's model of organic intellectuals, who 'arise from within and are passionately connected to, the subaltern class' (Meek, 2015, p. 1181).

Interviewees often acknowledge the unlikelihood of their intellectual activism. For example, Giuseppina remarks, 'anche se quasi eravamo analfabeti, lo spirito della lotta l'ho sempre avuto' (Trombetti & Fortini, 1999). Interviewees particularly link their activism with left-wing newspapers, saying 'abbiamo sempre dato via "*L'Unità*", "*Vie Nuove*", "*Rinascita*", i nostri giornali [...]. Io la mattina prima andavo a dare

via il giornale, poi andavo in dimostrazione' (Trombetti & Fortini, 1999). Another interviewee similarly remembers, 'avevamo come dei nastrini, delle coccardine, per prendere due soldi, per tirare avanti il nostro partito di più, per aiutarlo, [...] noi di Filo avevamo quel compito lì di dare via le coccardine, dei giornalini' (Biavati & Biavati, 1999). Not only do the *mondine* give out political literature, but they also remembering reading it, saying, 'il giornale lo leggevamo tutti i giorni [...] se potessi prenderei il giornale tutti i giorni, perché mi piace leggere' (Zagatti, et al., 1998). This activism is particularly unusual in terms of gender roles; the *mondine* were expected to become not only practical but also intellectual participants in their class struggle. One woman recounts an exchange with her comrade that demonstrates this; she remembers asking him "cosa vuoi che mi interessi di queste riunioni? A me devi dire cosa ne debbo fare di questi foglietti e dove li debbo portare" [...]. E lui diceva, "no, per avere coscienza bisogna sapere anche" (Verzelli & Zappaterra, 2001, p. 50). The consciousness to which this interviewee refers is evocative of Gramsci's own *coscienza di classe* (Gramsci, 1975), and of Landy's comment about the 'critical consciousness of the world' (Landy, 1994, p. 30) that organic intellectuals must possess.

A similar spirit of organic intellectualism can be found in tales of the work the *mondine* undertook alongside weeding. One interviewee became an unofficial postperson for her area, explaining, 'prima della guerra non c'erano neanche i postini, la posta veniva nei tabaccaï, allo spaccio, e io portavo, e lui [mio marito] mi diceva "la corriera" [...] da allora io ho sempre fatto [...] di' così, di' colà' (Biavati & Biavati, 1999). This story is mirrored by another *mondina*, Paolina, who became a regional nurse. Her story is told in the UDI archives in Ferrara:

Impara del tutto casualmente: una ragazza che abitava nello stesso vicinato di Paola si era ammalata e il medico come cura le aveva assegnato un ciclo di iniezioni, dovrebbe farglieli il padre di Paolina che durante la prima guerra mondiale aveva svolto funzione di infermiere, 'ma lei si vergognava di mio padre' e il padre la istruisce su come fare un'iniezione 'e così imparai proprio su di lei' (Archivio Storico Udi di Ferrara, 2014, p. 27).

Again, women recall education and labour as being a result of circumstance. These memories portray the *mondine* as organic intellectuals, evoking a left-wing identity, bound to notions of class solidarity and collective emancipation. These memories of the *mondine's* *impegno* are particularly powerful in a historical canon which has not recognised the political character of women's activism (Rossi-Doria, 2000, p. 361). Oral histories not only reinforce a left-wing identity, but they also break down gendered ideas of uneducated women, women as non-violent, tied to the domestic sphere, or women who fulfil segregated or marginal roles in political organisations.

Martire del lavoro / Madre di due bambine / Compagna di tutti gli oppressi / In lotta per il proprio riscatto / Qui cadde / MARIA MARGOTTI

Thus reads the plaque erected in memory of Maria Margotti, alleged *mondina* and resident of Filo d'Argenta, assassinated by a member of the *Celere* at an agricultural workers' protest on 17 May 1949. Margotti was shot at Ponte Stoppino, in the area between Argenta and Marmorta, Bologna, as part of a police reaction to a large-scale protest about the use of illegal agricultural labour.⁸³

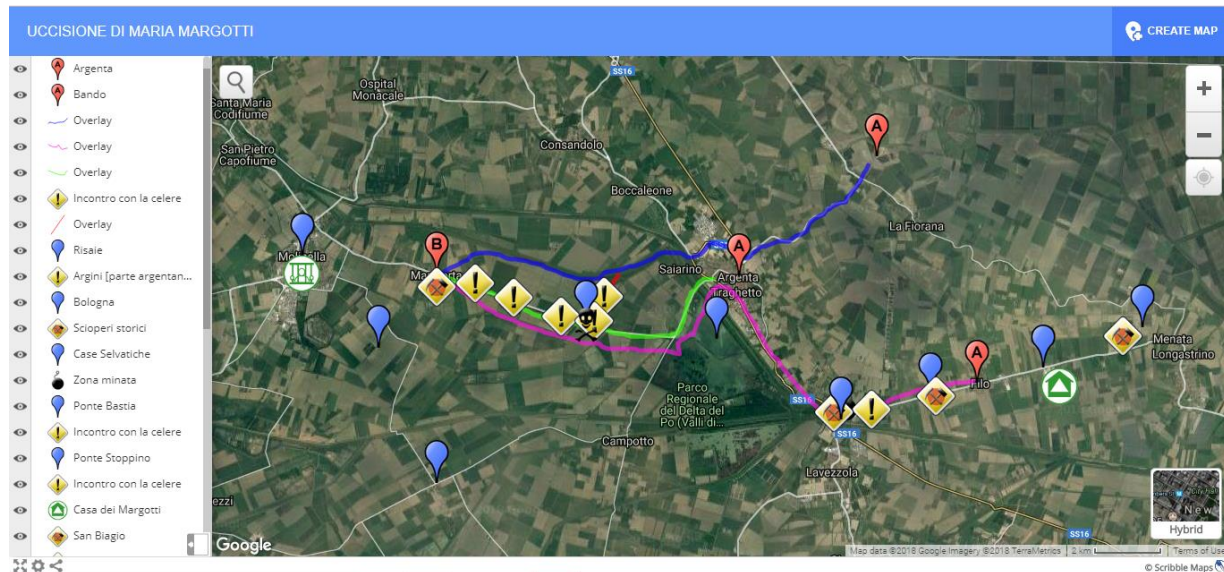


Figure 18 Interactive map of oral histories recounting the assassination of Maria Margotti. Accessible at <http://www.scribblemaps.com/maps/view/Uccisione_di_Maria_Margotti/MariaMargotti>

This event is the focus of a research project by Gavioli (1999), to whom I am grateful for making the transcripts of her interviews with ex-*mondine* available to me.⁸⁴ I supplement the memories included in these interviews with archival material, including photographs, letters, and newspaper articles, held by the CGIL and central archive of UDI.⁸⁵ The cultural and collective memories produced around the figure of Margotti are of importance to this chapter as a whole, because they exemplify and problematise the instrumentalization of the *mondine* to represent left-wing ideas of the nation. By comparing interview testimonies from Margotti's contemporaries and historical sources we can make conjectures about the mnemonic construction processes which have produced the figure of Margotti which we see today. To return to Ghirardini's comment that the *mondine* have been instrumentalised in memory (Gavioli, 2015),

⁸³ I have created a detailed interactive map integrating the events and oral histories surrounding the shooting of Margotti which can be accessed at the link below.

⁸⁴ Gavioli's project collects testimonies in nine interviews with *mondine* who participated in the strike which led to Margotti's death, and one with her orphaned daughter, Giuseppina Baldini.

⁸⁵ CGIL photographs relating to Margotti can be accessed online at: <<https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/search?page=2&q=what%3A%22Margotti+Maria%22>> [Accessed 01/02/2018].

this final section presents how Margotti has been commemorated, uncovering the false memories and instrumentalization of her death by the Left.

I will begin with a discussion of how Margotti has become such a figurehead of cultural memory of the *mondine*. Margotti's fame is largely a result of commemoration by left-wing organisations, such as the UDI, and left-wing newspapers. For example, following Margotti's death, UDI's publication *Noi donne* published a special pamphlet dedicated to her in May 1949. Renata Viganò also commemorated Margotti's death every year as long as she wrote for the paper *Noi donne*, effectively writing 'Margotti-as-historical-figure into existence' (Ruberto, 2008, p. 41). The formation of the *Coro Maria Margotti* has also garnered national and international recognition. A number of monuments have been erected for Margotti and her image has been included in large-scale protests alongside figures such as Fernando Ercolei who was shot by the *celere* at a protest in late 1948. Ruberto also suggests that Silvana of *Riso amaro*, released so shortly after Margotti's death, functioned as a kind of 'cinematic afterlife for Margotti' (Ruberto, 2008, p. 45). In 1982, a road near where Margotti was shot, between Molinella and Argenta, was named after her.



Figure 19 Commemorative statue of Margotti in Molinella

<https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2022069/10978_DE846FBA_4C20_4B06_B224_BC48EC3D49F1.html?q=what%3A%22Margotti+Maria%22> [Accessed 02/07/2018]

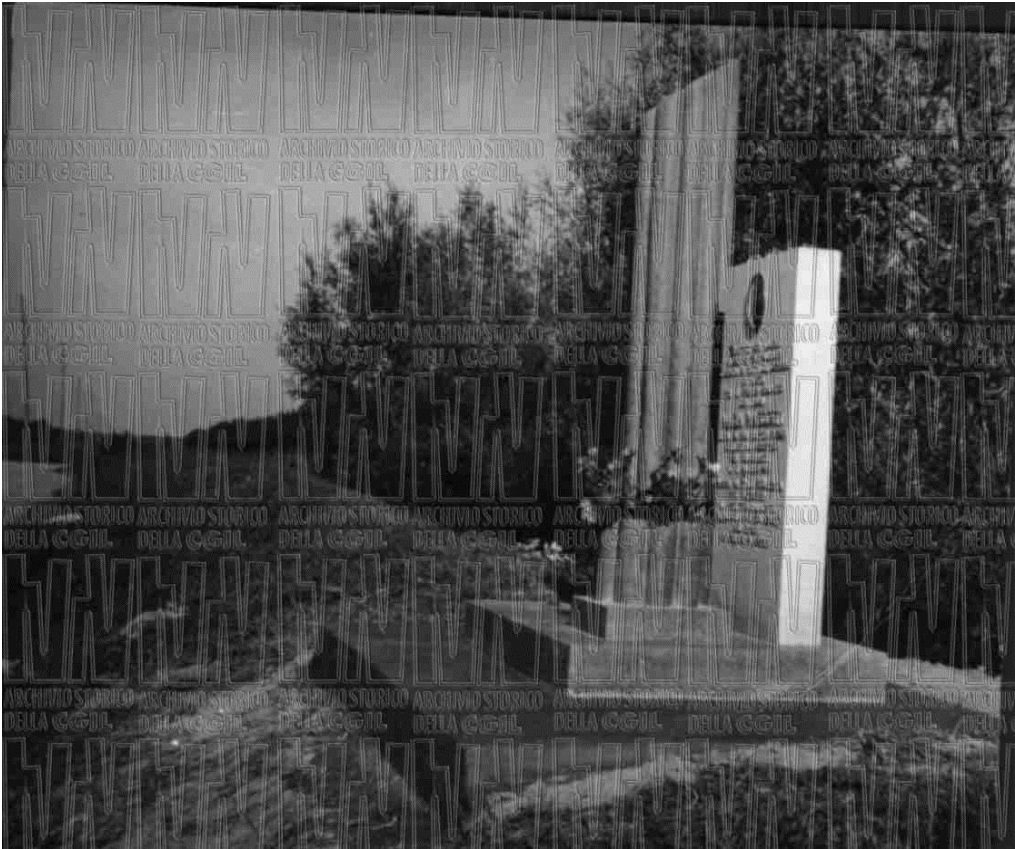


Figure 20 Gravestone and plaque in Molinella in commemoration of Margotti

<https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2022069/10978_91A671A6_D579_4213_8CC5_C0F48944E64B.html?q=maria+margotti> [Accessed 02/07/2018]



Figure 21 Margotti's image used at unnamed protest

<https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2022069/10978_9A79D493_7082_43A1_B9FB_26EEECAC4B19.html?l%5Bp%5D%5Bq%5D=maria+margotti&l%5Br%5D=19&l%5Bt%5D=24&q=maria+margotti> [Accessed 02/07/2018]

Why then, has Margotti's death been so important to the *mondine* and to the political Left? Gavioli posits that 'le donne si rispecchiano in Maria, si mettono per un momento al suo posto, [...] che può rivivere per un attimo attraverso le loro parole, consentissero a lei di rispecchiarsi in loro' (Gavioli, 1999, pp. 123-124). Ruberto remarks that commemoration of Margotti's death is one of the ways in which the Left has sought to reinforce 'Gramsci's emphasis on the need to build alliances and subaltern representation in order to achieve political change' (Ruberto, 2008, p. 41). Elsewhere, commemoration of Margotti is described as 'una pietra miliare' (La Voce di Molinella, 1949) for the recognition of peasant struggle and Imbergamo portrays her as 'un soldato della classe lavoratrice' (Imbergamo, 2014, p. 173).

In order for Margotti to become this symbolic figure, however, selections and inventions regarding her identity have been made. Few of the women interviewed had actually known Margotti, yet in their choral performances the group announces 'il nostro coro porta il suo nome, e se non ci conoscete guardateci negli occhi, noi siamo le compagne di Maria Margotti' (Gavioli, 1999, p. 115). This adoption of Margotti as a *mondina* could therefore be read as political rather than sentimental. In her article of 18 May 1950 in *L'Unità* Renata Viganò said of Margotti, 'è morta come poteva morire qualsiasi altra delle donne del Mulino di Filo, perché sono tutte braccianti e compagne, e allo sciopero tutte aderiscono [...] è diventata un simbolo' (Viganò, 1950). It is precisely this representation of Margotti as a peasant everywoman that renders her a figure ripe for commemoration. Statements like Viganò's may also have motivated Margotti's remediation as a *mondina*. Ropa and Venturoli note how Margotti was 'ricordata come mondina, quando in realtà era una operaia della fornace di Argenta ed una bracciante' (Ropa & Venturoli, 2010, p. 183). This is perhaps too categorical; in UDI's pamphlet, Margotti is said to have gone 'ogni anno alla monda del riso' (Anghel, 1949, p. 10), suggesting that Margotti may have worked seasonally as a *mondina*, and has been subsumed into this memorable community. Confronting this very issue, one interviewee remembers, 'un gruppo di giovani è passato lì vicino [al coro] e ci hanno chiesto: "Ascoltate, voi che ricordate Maria Margotti: ma è una fabbrica?", "No, non è una fabbrica, è una mondina – noi dicevamo una mondina – che è morta nel nostro paese, in uno sciopero"' (Gavioli, 1999, p. 115). Such contemporary memory may be the result of remediation of Margotti's identity which happened much closer to the event itself. There is evidence from as early as 20 May 1949 that Margotti was identified as a *mondina* by the Associazione Nazionale dei Partigiani Italiani (ANPI) in a letter proposing to take charge of Margotti's orphaned children (further discussed below), as well as in local newspapers (La Voce di Molinella, 1949), and in the UDI pamphlet on her death.

As well as a *mondina*, Margotti is most frequently described as a mother and a *donna seria* in the sources. Interviewees describe her as 'una donna con poche parole, ma sincera' (Bertuzzi, et al., 1999), 'una donna seria, non le piaceva tanto parlare' (Zagatti, et al., 1998), and 'una donna chiusa [...] che io non avevo nemmeno tanto presente' (Brandolini, et al., 1998). We could hypothesise here that the *mondine* transform their scarce personal knowledge of Margotti, describing her in a way which echoes qualities of the ideal working-class activist. Qualities like being unsophisticated yet moral, trustworthy and quiet could be said to

embody certain Gramscian ideals of organic intellectuals. Togliatti scorned the inaction of traditional intellectuals in the face of Fascism for example, saying 'questo intellettuale è degno soltanto di disprezzo' (Togliatti, 1973, p. 492). Unlike 'traditional' intellectuals who were full of fine words and inaction, memory of Margotti portrays her as reserved in word but not in deed, committed to what the *Voce di Molinella* proclaimed as 'un ideale di libertà e di giustizia [...] che per questo ideale immolò la sua vita' (La Voce di Molinella, 1949).

Margotti's political engagement appears to have been similarly exaggerated. The May 1949 front cover of CGIL's magazine *Lavoro*, features a photograph of Margotti's daughters crying at her funeral and a caption stating: 'è stata uccisa dalla polizia perché difendeva il paese della sua famiglia' (CGIL, 1949). Neither was the protest about defending the town, nor was Margotti's family originally from Molinella. This caption could convincingly have been in a wartime article about the occupation of Italy, so reminiscent is it of Resistance rhetoric. Contemporary sources too, such as Wikipedia and the *Enciclopedia della donna*, show evidence of divided or false memory.⁸⁶ Wikipedia states that Margotti 'partecipò alle lotte sindacali per le sette ore di lavoro' (Wikipedia, 2017), but the website of the *Enciclopedia della donna* contradicts this, saying 'era una donna che non era mai stata a una manifestazione' (Borgato, 2015). Other attempts are made to link Margotti's death to the success of the strike, describing it as 'eroico per la sua drammaticità' (Borgato, 2015), and a 'vittorioso sciopero bracciantile in un clima di lotta unitaria, a cui aveva contribuito il sacrificio di Maria Margotti' (La Voce di Molinella, 1949).

The most marked example of falsely equating Margotti with left-wing activism can be found in allusions to her as a partisan. One author in the *Voce di Molinella* describes how she only recognised Margotti in reports of a death when referred to by her nickname, because 'tutti hanno un soprannome, come il nome di battaglia [...] come noi da partigiani' (La Voce di Molinella, 1949). The letter sent to Margotti's family by the ANPI serves a similar function. This letter, in which the ANPI offers to care for Margotti's daughters in the 'Convitto-Scuola per orfani di partigiani', does so 'rendendosi interprete della fraterna solidarietà dei Partigiani verso tutti i lavoratori che tanto di sé hanno dato nella lotta della Resistenza' (ANPI, 1949). Margotti's Resistance participation is ambiguous: even the UDI publication on her death states only 'tutto Filo [era] dalla parte della Resistenza' (Anghel, 1949, p. 10). Here again we can observe an desire to render Margotti a figure of the left-wing symbol *par excellence* of the Resistance. These sources conflate Margotti's death with wider social and political struggles which may have in fact featured minimally for Margotti during her lifetime.

This section concludes with a reflection on the politics of commemoration which Margotti's legacy can gift us. On one hand, many interviewees express the importance of keeping Margotti's memory alive,

⁸⁶ These are the top two search results on Google (<https://www.google.fr/search?q=maria+margotti&oq=Maria&aqs=chrome.69i59j69i57j69i65l2j69i60j0.947j0j7&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8> [Accessed 24/06/2015]), excluding an article on 'i-Italy' by Laura E. Ruberto (Ruberto, 2008), which paraphrases much of her excellent section on the rice workers, in her book *Gramsci, Migration, and the Representation of Women's Work in Italy and the U.S.* (Ruberto, 2009, pp. 40-50).

saying 'voi fate questa iniziativa per la Maria Margotti, ma dovrebbero farlo a scuola, dovrebbero metterla nella storia, quella cosa lì' (Zagatti, et al., 1998). Other interviewees echo this lament, saying 'alcuni dicono che non sono cose vere [...] non sono interessati a conoscere la storia della loro zona, le lotte che le mamme hanno fatto [...] però è brutto, perché bisogna saperle, le cose' (Biavati & Biavati, 1999). Here, interviewees reflect Yuval-Davis' argument that women are used as 'cultural symbols of the collectivity, [...] and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 67). This conflict between remembering and forgetting is just one tension in the remembrance process. The case of Margotti raises questions not simply about the politics of changing or remediating history, but about removing it from the cultural sphere altogether. If 'remembering and forgetting are two sides – or different processes – of the same coin' (Erlil & Nunning, 2010, p. 8), there is much to be asked about the society which would wilfully forget a figure like Margotti. The issue marks a point of tension between the generation of *mondine* who actively commemorate Margotti and the generations following them, perhaps reflecting that in a new national context, the relevance of Margotti's symbolism has declined.

In contrast to the desire of some *mondine*'s enthusiasm for remembering Margotti, her daughter Giuseppina provides a heartrending example of the impact of the attention her mother's death received. When asked how she felt about the formation of the *Coro di Maria Margotti*, she replied 'mi hanno chiesto prima se ero d'accordo, ma... vuoi che dica di no? Vuol dire che è ricordata, cosa vuoi che dica?' (Baldini & Siroli, 1998). A friend of Baldini's, Ansaldo, who was present at the interview goes on to explain: 'c'è sempre stata da parte degli zii, [...] che non avevano piacere che loro [le figlie Margotti] andassero neanche tanto in giro, perché [...] pensava che strumentalizzassero, anche, questa cosa. Purtroppo era la sinistra allora, che lo faceva' (Baldini & Siroli, 1998). These statements speak of the conflict between political duty to commemorate and personal right to private grief.

Supporting the thesis that Margotti's death was unethically exploited, the CGIL holds a number of photographs which, by today's standards, would be judged at best insensitive and at worst unethical. These photographs include one taken through the window of the car transporting Margotti's body from the scene of the crime, and another close-up shot of Margotti's daughter crying at her funeral.



Figure 22 Margotti's body being transported from the crime scene

<https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2022069/10978_10B261D0_6EE0_4811_82FC_35559E6C4281.html?l%5Bp%5D%5Bq%5D=maria+margotti&l%5Br%5D=2&l%5Bt%5D=24&q=maria+margotti> [Accessed 02/07/2018]



Figure 23 Margotti's daughters at her funeral

<https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2022069/10978_33F48706_83AC_491D_8641_7A050AECAF68.html?l%5Bp%5D%5Bq%5D=maria+margotti&l%5Br%5D=20&l%5Bt%5D=24&q=maria+margotti> [Accessed 02/07/2018]

The latter photo was used on the May 1949 front cover of *Lavoro* (CGIL, 1949). Giuseppina also refers to a photo of Margotti as a young woman which went 'in voga' (Baldini & Siroli, 1998) in the Italian press after her death. Recognising the psychological damage of the commemoration of Margotti by the left, Ansaldo comments:

Io sono anche orgogliosa della storia del mio partito, però capisco anche adesso che se si dovesse fare con dei giovani, i giovani di adesso, direbbero 'Ci vai poi tu, sul palco! Perché mi è morta mia mamma' [...]. Però, allora, era la nostra storia. C'era la guerra fredda, ti avevano ammazzato i tuoi e cercavi di far ricordare alla gente le ingiustizie, e queste cose qui [my emphasis] (Baldini & Siroli, 1998).

This testimony powerfully connects the sense of duty on the Left to exploit the political importance of Margotti's death and the personal trauma which it caused. Gavioli's interview with Margotti's daughter Giuseppina is marked by reticence, shown in minimal or evasive answers. When I enquired about this, Gavioli confirmed, 'era difficile farla parlare. Penso che lei e la sorella abbiano sofferto molto per tutta la vicenda [...] perché sono state – si direbbe oggi – molto esposte a livello mediatico. Insomma, credo che avrebbero preferito vivere in modo più riservato il loro dolore' (Gavioli, 2015). Commemoration of Margotti is rearticulated here as a loss rather than a gain. This problematises commemoration, suggesting that the female subject is instrumentalised, and her truth lost. This is even more problematic for memory studies which seeks to give voice to subaltern subjects. In Margotti's memory, the personal is sacrificed for the collective and women become, unwillingly, 'embodiments of the collectivity' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 23).

Conclusion

This chapter has presented evidence to show the link between left-wing discourse and the collective and cultural memories of the *mondine*. The *mondine* are presented, and present themselves, as idealised working-class, rural labourers, able to symbolise Italy's rebirth. Both their pre-World War Two history, and their participation in the Resistance, made them ripe for symbolic exploitation by left-wing organisations. The oral histories studied here exemplify the exploitation of the Italian Left's nostalgia for agriculturalism, associationism, solidarity, and Resistance during the years between 1945 and 1965. Although the *mondine* foreground their political, industrial, and intellectual activism, there is an argument to be made that their wartime Resistance was as much motivated by the potential emancipation of an exploited subaltern class as it was by a specific opposition to Nazi-Fascism. Yet, as the case of Margotti proves, the transformation of the *mondine* into political figureheads is not without complication. As in the case of filmic *mondine*, the symbolic burden of the nation may come at personal cost. Certainly, the *mondine* are remembered and commemorated more for their symbolism as heroines and martyrs than for their work.

Section 2

Sarte

Sarte of post-World War Two Italy embody many of the major social preoccupations of the time. Their work poised them at the convergence point of practicality and luxury, of artisanal production and industrialisation, of the domestic and the professional. In other words, their lives and work exemplified post-World War Two Italy's crossroads: tradition or modernity? The next two chapters on seamstresses look at how *sarte* interacted with ideas of modernity and new spaces. Paying particular attention to the urban context of *sarte*'s work, the chapters address Laura Ruberto's criticism that 'even within the city, work ordinarily performed by women [...] is not usually discussed in labour histories' (Ruberto, 2008, p. 4). Chapter 3 examines filmic portrayals of *sarte* in the films *Sorelle Materassi* (Poggioli, 1943), *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* (Emmer, 1952) and *Le amiche* (Antonioni, 1955). In Chapter 4, a comparison is made with oral histories from a body of seven original interviews with seamstresses who worked between 1945 and 1965. Research into the work of seamstresses is important not only because *sarte* have been neglected in historical scholarly enquiry, but also because their case is so closely tied to social and economic change in postwar Italy.

Fashion & Nation

Fashion (and its employees) are at the frontier of the dialectic between tradition and modernity. In postwar Italy, fashion was associated with glamour, film, Hollywood, America, and consumerism. *Sarte* worked outside the home, often in urban environments, opening them up to all the good and bad that an urban reality might present. They earned wages, which, although systematically lower than those of their male counterparts, gave them a degree of financial independence and agency.⁸⁷ *Sarte* had greater social mobility; often from *ceti popolari*, they nonetheless became known and appreciated by their upper-class clients, sometimes forming romantic relationships with them (Maher, 2007, p. 286). This social mobility and its link to modernity is a theme to which Chapters 3 and 4 return.

Yet, the *sarte*'s work also fit into conventional notions of female employment. Needlework, provision of clothing, and cultivation of appearance, have been deemed women's work since antiquity. As Victoria De Grazia points out, during Fascism women were forced out of specific professional sectors, and encouraged into other, more acceptably 'feminine', including that of the seamstress (De Grazia, 1992, p. 166). It is important to recognise the social acceptability of seamstresses as working women as it evidences

⁸⁷ See Figures 39, 40, and 41 in Chapter 4.

how they are positioned at an ideological faultline in Italian society between modernity and tradition, domesticity, and emancipation.

The role of fashion as symbol of nation has long been identified by historians, and reinforces the idea that the *sarte*, as creators of style, wielded more influence over society than we might first assume. In her introduction to a special edition of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* on fashion, Eugenia Paulicelli states, 'fashion as a social institution of modernity exercised power in the creation of taste, desire, consumption choices; and, [...] fashion and dress were intertwined with the idea of nation, identity and place' (Paulicelli, 2015, p. 3). Paulicelli points out that it was particularly in the period between 1950 and 1960 that fashion began to play a key part in creating an international identity for Italy. She highlights the rise of 'Made in Italy' as symbolic of an embrace of America and, in a Cold War context, of capitalist values, saying, 'the international recognition of Italian fashion was certified, facilitated and cemented by international relations between Italy and the United States, PR and business relations that were mutually beneficial during the Cold War' (Paulicelli, 2015, p. 5). In this way, fashion was a form of diplomacy, populated and, to some extent, spearheaded by women. Fashion is also a form of embodied cultural capital, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1985). The coming chapters discuss how this capital becomes as valuable as monetary currency, and how *sarte* were, again, facilitators and managers of this.

As already noted, women's bodies were a site where concerns about morality, politics and nationhood were negotiated. There is a direct interplay with fashion here; the way in which women dressed their bodies was socially, politically, and even religiously charged. In 1941, Pope Pius XII, 'esorta la donna a vestirsi con modestia, con dignità, contro lo edonismo sfrenato [del] cinema' (Bossaglia, 1984, p. 42). As influential players in vestimentary practices, *sarte* participated in the construction of women's bodies, and by that merit, the nation.

Sarto, sarta, sartina, caterinetta

The label *sarta* covers many different roles and ranks of women working within the made-to-measure textile industry. Clothing had been being made by professional textile workers, seamstresses, tailors and the like for centuries, in postwar *sartorie* there remained a strict gender division of labour; men and women could work as *sarti/sarte da uomo*, but only women could work as *sarte da donna*.⁸⁸ Often the clear distinction between a designer, seamstress, and so on was blurred. At the highest levels, in the *sartoria*

⁸⁸ As a general rule, Fiorella Imprenti notes that 'negli atelier per signora lavoravano le *sartine*, tutte donne' (Imprenti, 2007, p. 147). Similarly, in collective contracts and salary tables held at the CGIL Bologna, provisions are made for male and female workers in documents for *sartorie da uomo*. In documents for *sartorie da donna* no provisions are made for male employees apart from *fattorini* or *magazzinieri*. It appears that there were a few, high-ranking men who worked in *sartoria da donna* as fabric cutters or the like.

Sorelle Fontana for example, the women who designed the garment also cut and constructed it. In my interviews, it became apparent that designs were often bought in the form of *cartamodelli* from France, and then shared and adapted by the *sarta* and clients. Commonly, several *sarte* clubbed together to purchase and share amongst themselves a handful of the costly Parisian designs. Sometimes, *sarte* would receive a packet of fabric from clients, and were charged with designing, cutting and constructing a garment with the given fabric (Neri, 2016).⁸⁹

Curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum Sonnet Stanfill describes the employment structure of larger *sartorie* (employing more than twelve workers) as having ‘a three-tiered hierarchy with senior, middle and junior levels. The senior workers were responsible for cutting; the middle workers were charged with completing the work of the seniors, and the junior staff performed small, simple tasks’ (Stanfill, 2015, p. 89). In fact, the *sartoria*’s employment structure between the 1940s and 1970s was much more complex, as shown by *contratti collettivi* and *tabelle salariali* in the CGIL archive in Bologna. These archival documents ranging from 1945 to 1963 show that employees were subdivided into multiple categories: *Maestra, 1' categoria, 2' categoria, 3' categoria, aiutanti, apprendiste*.⁹⁰ *Apprendisti*, also known in northern dialects as *cite* or *piscinine*, were at the bottom of the pile; usually employed between fourteen and twenty years old, they had to undergo two to four years of training. *Indossatrici* were also included in the collective agreements.⁹¹ Notably, most categories and salaries were determined by seniority. Even among employees of the same level there were further specificities: women who only sewed hems, women who embroidered, and so on.

The number of terms for women working as seamstresses varied and (to some extent) reflected their hierarchical positions. Fiorella Imprenti describes how women working as *sarte da donna* were referred to with the diminutive *sartine* ‘in riferimento alla giovane età media, ma anche alla convinzione che la produzione di abiti femminili richiedesse una minore professionalità’ (Imprenti, 2007, p. 147). Sometimes, the term was used to describe small-scale, domestic seamstresses. There were also the *caterinette*, the provenance of whose name appears to be related to their associations with high fashion. In an interview for the opening of the exhibition *Affetti personali. Storie di donne e di moda* in Turin, one ex-President of the *Circolo delle Caterinette* said that the name *Circolo delle sarte* was dismissed because it was ‘troppo ampolloso’ (Rossi & Pilotto, 2014). The etymology of the word ‘caterinetta’, with its link to

⁸⁹ This system was generally discussed with distaste on the part of the *sarte* with whom I spoke. They expressed a dislike for having to work with someone else’s choice of material, implying that, as experts in their field, they should have been given the choice of this fundamental aspect of garment creation.

⁹⁰ Initially in the agreements provisions are made only for 1st and 2nd category workers, but from 1948 the category of *aiutante* was added, and from 1963 *aiutanti* were replaced with 3rd category workers, and another rank was added.

⁹¹ Models were used to show the clothes to clients, who would then order a design to be made to their measurements. In the collective agreement in the CGIL archive, from 1946 *indossatrici* are divided into 1st and 2nd categories; models who travelled for work or were used in the *laboratorio* were 1st category, those used in the showroom were 2nd category.

Catherine of Alexandria, patron saint of girls of marriageable age, suggests that it was used for younger seamstresses in search of a label which distanced them from the more staid *sarte*.

Within the specific category of *sarte*, women had very different lived and professional experiences. Their work varied from domestic piece-work, to working in rural workshops with a handful of women (often relatives), to working in large *ateliers* with scores of colleagues. This chapter cannot hope to encompass the experiences of all women who worked as seamstresses in the post-World War Two period. I have elected to focus on seamstresses who worked in *ateliers* because of their clear-cut identities as women in the public workplace, and because of the associations with modernity, urbanity, and new ideas of womanhood that this implied.⁹²

The *ateliers* of the postwar period were rigidly structured, whether large or small. They were hierarchical, and climbing the professional ladder was a perilous process. Vanessa Maher suggests that apprentices were neither encouraged nor trained, because they represented a potential threat to the women working above them, and a greater financial burden to owners as they became more skilled. Conversely, if a seamstress married, she could no longer work in the *atelier*, and was henceforth given piece-work to do at home, or, if she was enterprising, would seize the opportunity to *mettersi in proprio*. The law forbidding the dismissal of *sarte* upon marriage was only established in 1963 (Maher, 2007, p. 87). Oral histories collected for this project do not suggest that *sarte* were competitive amongst themselves, but that the working environment was simply too pressurised for training or nurturing less-skilled workers. Close contact with designs, or even one *sarta* undertaking a whole project, was regarded by directors of fashion houses as risky because it meant the workers might be able to reproduce or steal designs. Even before being able to set up their own businesses, seamstresses posed the threat of changing employer, taking with them an *atelier's* training, knowledge and possibly its designs. This led fashion houses to take a division of labour approach, with each *sarta* completing a fraction of a project.

Poor treatment of workers is an issue raised in a number of the historical works I studied, yet this does not tally either with the interviews I collected, nor with the contractual documentation from the CGIL Bologna. Maher raises the issue of excessive working hours, as well as back pain and eye problems as a result of poor light and strain (Maher, 2007, p. 86). Maher also notes that women worked with the ebb and flow of the fashion seasons, and so at peak times could be working twenty-hour days, whereas during the *stagione morta*, they might be sent home without pay (Maher, 2007, p. 75-76). Vicenza Maugeri, who studied the *sartoria* Maria Venturi in Bologna in the 1950s, states that 'alla fine di ogni stagione le lavoranti erano licenziate per essere poi riassunte quando iniziava il nuovo periodo' (Maugeri, 2012, p. 20). The testimonies I collected do not support the above statements, possibly because the women I spoke with

⁹² Vanessa Maher engages with the history of the domestic *sarte* in her book (2007). I by no means discount domestic work as non-work, as has been the case throughout much of the past. It is simply for coherence with the portrayals I have found in fiction films, and the interviews which I subsequently found from women who worked in *ateliers*, that I do not embark on this worthy subject. Nonetheless, we should note that domestic *sarte* often still worked under the auspices of an *atelier*, receiving piece-work to complete at home.

worked mainly in the post-World War Two period, during which protective legislation was put into force. Both stability and pay were unpredictable until the mid-1940s, after which point contracts ensured fundamental rights like an eight-hour working day, statutory holidays and paid maternity leave (although to a large extent only in larger urban *ateliers*) (Maher, 2007, p. 103). Salaries increased, in some cases by as much as 1400 per cent between 1945 and 1963.

Existing Literature

Most similar to the enquiry of this thesis is Vanessa Maher's monograph on oral histories with seamstresses in Turin between 1860 and 1960. My own research finds crossovers and contrasts with Maher's study, fleshing out a picture of *sarte*'s experiences and memories in postwar Italy. Historical studies of *sarte* include Maher's book chapter 'Sewing the Seams of Society: Dressmakers and Seamstresses in Turin Between the Wars' (1987) and Eugenia Paulicelli's article (2015) in the special edition of *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* (2015, 20:1) which she edited. These studies are useful for understanding the state of the fashion industry in Italy between 1920 and 1960, and particularly as Maher notes the important 'link between fashion and [...] rapid industrialization and social change' (Maher, 1987, p. 134). These studies lead me to scrutinise *sarte* as symbols of modernity and national development; this link between fashion and nation being bolstered by theoretical works by fashion sociologists (Crane, 2001) and (Kawamura, 2004). The historical time frame for Maher's research is wide, with much attention being given to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a feature shared with Imprenti's work *Operaie e socialismo: Milano le leghe femminili, la camera del lavoro (1891-1918)* (2007). Imprenti includes a contextually informative study of conditions for *sarte* in the period leading up to Fascism. The literature by Imprenti and Maher is the only material which directly addresses the conditions of the *sarte*.

There exist historical works which focus on Italian design and designers, such as *Artisti del quotidiano* by fashion researcher Elisa Tolsi Brandi (2009), *Moda a Bologna anni '50-'60: sartoria Maria Venturi* (Maugeri, 2012) and the autobiography by Micol Fontana *Uno Specchio a Tre Luci* (1991). Academics at the Rimini campus of the Università di Bologna, which specialises in fashion history, have compiled a rich archive of sketches and designs from the post-World War Two period, providing an interesting contextual framework for studying *sarte* (Bossaglia, 1984). My research is also informed by Stanfill's article on her research for the exhibition 'The Glamour of Italian Fashion, 1945-2014' (2014). Crucially, Stanfill underlines this 'little-studied area of fashion production, that of Italy's regional, small-scale dressmakers' (Stanfill, 2014, p. 84), underscoring the critical gap to which this thesis responds.

The lack of interest in Italian fashion of the post-World War Two period may be explained by the moments between which it occurs; Fascism's fashion autarchy in the 1920s and the rise of *prêt-à-porter* in

the 1960s and 1970s. There has been considerable recent interest in fashion during Fascism from Alessandra Vaccari and Mario Lupano (2009), and Paulicelli (2015). The post-World War Two period marks a rise in the importance of the creators of garments, particularly thanks to cinema; 'il sarto era un dipendente spesso senza volto, solo un nome, subalterno alla committenza. Nel dopoguerra il discorso si ribalta: sempre filmati, fotografati, offerti al pubblico attraverso i rotocalchi' (Bossaglia, 1984, p. 45). This chapter augments the currently scant historical material available on the subject of postwar *sarte*, and asks how representations and oral histories interact with social change in Italy.

Chapter 3 – *Sarte* in Film

‘[The *sartoria* is a space for women] to transgress class boundaries, to evade the domestic and private norms considered proper to their sex [...] to avoid male control of relations among women’ (Maher, 1987, p. 145)

Seamstresses were, in spatial terms, a privileged class of women in post-World War Two Italy. Historian Vanessa Maher highlights ‘their peculiar position, as a category of workers, with respect to the rest of society’ (Maher, 1987, p. 137), particularly noting what she calls their ‘*motilità*’ (Maher, 2007, p. 201). The mobility of seamstresses concerned not just the physical act of going to the workplace, but the ideological and social implications of their work. Feminist geographer Doreen Massey asserts that ‘spaces and places are not only in themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood’ (Massey, 1994, p. 179). This chapter examines the spaces and places accorded to *sarte* in post-World War Two Italian film, asking how and why they are gendered. Mary Wood affirms that cinematic narratives of this period which explored female mobility were ‘experienced as profoundly disorientating’ (Wood, 2006, pp. 60-61), according with the wider observation that ‘the attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity’ (Massey, 1994, p. 179). This chapter asks how spatial control of female working characters expresses attempts to manage emerging female identities. With particular attention to the urban space, the chapter explores how women ‘represent disorder [...] uncontrolled and chaotic sexual license’ (Wilson, 1991, p. 157), and how in the context of 1950s Italy ‘metropolitan life itself seemed to throw up such a threat to patriarchal control’ (Massey, 1994, p. 180). Fashion historian Eugenia Paulicelli notes how fashion was ‘a social institution of modernity [...] fashion and dress were intertwined with the idea of nation, identity and place’ (Paulicelli, 2015, p. 3). The present chapter looks at how the *sarte* interact with and exemplify modernity, and how this reflects wider social and political debate. In doing so, this chapter finds continuity with the previous chapters on the *mondine* and the interplay of women, modernity, and nation.

The films studied in this chapter are *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* (Emmer, 1952) and *Le amiche* (Antonioni, 1955). The chapter also provides an analysis of *Sorelle Materassi* (Poggioli, 1943), as a wartime counterpoint to these representations of *sarte*. These films span the liberation of Italy to what scholars have called the ‘restoration’ period of the early 1950s and into the increasingly affluent context of the late 1950s. We should recall the presence of the Christian Democrat government, and its embrace of “modernization” [...] strongly shaped by American influences, [...] the liberty of the individual and of the firm, the unfettered development of technology and consumer capitalism, [and] the free play of market forces’ (Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 153-54). The present chapter looks for evidence of attitudes towards this modernisation expressed through women and film. It is particularly pertinent that these films are set in

Rome, Turin, and Florence respectively, cities which saw extensive damage during World War Two, and which (certainly in the cases of Rome and Turin) saw rapid rebuilding and modernisation between 1945 and 1960 (Avveduto, 2012, p. 18).

Moving away from the political tensions discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, this section focuses on the evolution of spaces and expectations for women. The *sarte* studied here are women who ‘svolgevano tipologie di lavoro più visibili [...] e molti commentatori dell’epoca parlavano di crescente presenza delle donne sul mercato del lavoro’ (Willson, 2010, p. 207). Women’s increasing visibility and mobility in the public sphere as a result of World War Two has been remarked upon by historians Anna Bravo and Anna Maria Bruzzone (Bravo & Bruzzone, 2000, p. 63). The films analysed in this chapter demonstrate the new interest and concern over women in the public sphere. If political scientist Carole Pateman’s statement is true that ‘the dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist struggle’ (Pateman, 1989, p. 118), seamstresses are at a faultline in that terrain. This chapter reveals how concerns about women’s entry into the public sphere is articulated in film, and how this reflects wider concerns over national change.

There appear to be very few investigations of representations of *sarte*. In the British context, some work has been done into the figure of the seamstress in Victorian literature. Lynn M. Alexander notes that seamstresses were associated with modernity and industrialisation, and were used as symbols of the working classes (Alexander, 2003). In Italian film of this period, there is a designer/*sarta* character in Valerio Zurlini’s 1955 *Le ragazze di San Frediano*. Yet, there have been a number of contemporary television and film materials looking back at *sarte* in the postwar.⁹³ This may speak of a growing contemporary realisation of the role they played in modernisation and change. The evident lack of analysis of *sarte* in film points to the unique value of the present chapter, within the wider context of representations of working women.

This chapter first presents the films, noting their popular and critical receptions. The physical space of the post-World War Two *sarte* is the departure point for this chapter’s analysis. In this section, I look at the *sarte*’s occupation of private and public space, and the urban context more generally, using theoretical support from feminist geography. The following section examines the associations between the *sarte* and modern behaviours, looking particularly at dance, sexuality, and their economic independence. The final two sections of this chapter use Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic cultural capital and several theories of gaze to investigate how *sarte* are portrayed as having greater social mobility.

The Corpus

⁹³ These include the television series *Atelier Fontana: Le Sorelle della Moda* (2011), *Velvet* (2013), *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* (1998), and the film *Coco Before Chanel* (2008).

The earliest film I study, *Sorelle Materassi*, was filmed and released in the latter stages of World War Two, and is a comedy film claimed by Marcia Landy to 'hover between melodrama and satire' (Landy, 1992, p. 320). The film is based on a 1934 novel of the same name by Aldo Palazzeschi, and tells the tale of two late-middle aged sisters, Teresa and Carolina (Emma and Irma Gramatica) who fall prey to their charming but exploitative nephew, Remo (Massimo Serato). The two women have reached financial and social success through hard work as rural *sarte*, and own their own business. An impoverished past, caused by a wayward father, is hinted at. The sisters' financial success is threatened by their blind love for Remo, who appears in their lives only to begin borrowing money and eventually coercing the sisters into paying his debts. The two sisters live with their married (but abandoned or widowed) sister Giselda, their housemaid Niobe (Dina Romano), and apprentice Laurina (Anna Maria) who is also Remo's lover.⁹⁴ The film is loosely divided into two parts; in the first part Remo swindles his aunts and is generally portrayed as a cad. In the second part, Remo has a moral epiphany and becomes a car salesman, where he meets the rich Argentinian heiress Peggy who persistently seduces him. Initially her advances provoke his rage, but later, after she tricks him into staying in a rural hotel overnight with her, she procures a marriage proposal. Remo's marriage leads him to move out of his aunts' home, leaving them bereft. There has been very little study of *Sorelle Materassi*, perhaps because of its awkward historical position between Italian Fascism and Liberation. While Marcia Landy reads critiques of Fascism in *Sorelle Materassi*, it is 'the sexual politics of power [...] the self-sacrificing nature of maternal behaviour [...] [and] the fictions of masculinity and femininity' (Landy, 2002, p. 268) which are of particular interest to this chapter.

Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna is a 1952 film by Luciano Emmer, known for his light-hearted comedies such as *Domenica d'Agosto* (1950). Emmer was one of the founding fathers of 'pink' neorealism, 'comedies [produced] in response to the critical postwar years' (Carmini, 2013, p. 467). Pink neorealism was a reaction to the bleakness of the first neorealist oeuvres, articulating its narratives through laughter and sentimentality. The film follows the intertwining lives of three young *sarte*, Marisa, Lucia and Elena (Lucia Bosè, Liliana Bonfatti, and Cosette Greco). It traces the passage of the three friends as they court boyfriends who eventually become fiancés. Marisa faces turbulence in her relationship when she gets a promotion from *sarta* to fashion model. Lucia's love interest evades her because, as a professional jockey, he is initially too short to interest her. Elena's boyfriend, unofficially engaged to the daughter of his *capufficio*, gives Elena the run-around until she discovers his deceit and unsuccessfully attempts suicide. After Elena's crisis, the three women draw together in traditional and reassuring conclusions; Marisa gets engaged to her childhood sweetheart and gives up modelling, Lucia gives up on her romantic explorations and settles on the vertically-challenged jockey, and Elena finds love with an ultra-traditional taxi driver (Marcello Mastroianni). With box-office takings of 400,000,000 Lire (Chiti & Pioppi, 1991, p. 303), the film had the most positive popular reception of those studies here. The film's genre blends elements of comedy into the narrative, reminding us of Danielle Hipkins' observation that 'comedy, with its inherent optimistic

⁹⁴ Landy (1992, p. 291) suggests that Giselda has been abandoned, but I would argue that this is left ambiguous.

beat, pulls in the direction of resolving anxiety about gender roles' (Hipkins, 2016, p. 16). This is one of the ways in which *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* differs from *Le amiche*, which tends towards more ambiguous conclusions. Described as 'vivace e gustoso' (Meccoli, 1952) by *Epoca* magazine, the traditionalist and reassuring narrative of Emmer's film may go some way to explaining its popularity.⁹⁵

Finally, *Le amiche* is an adaptation by Michelangelo Antonioni of Cesare Pavese's 1949 novel *Tra donne sole*, and recounts the return to her native Turin of protagonist and Roman fashion house supervisor Clelia (Eleonora Rossi Drago).⁹⁶ Co-written by Suso Cecchi d'Amico and Alba de Cespedès, the film shows Clelia's entry into high society after discovering the wealthy Rosetta in critical condition in the hotel room next to hers, having attempted suicide. The acquaintances Clelia makes from this incident introduce her to a set of upper-class, but ultimately morally corrupt and purposeless, characters. Simultaneously, Clelia begins to fall for the assistant architect Carlo (Ettore Manni) who she meets at the construction site of the new *sartoria*. After an ambiguous flirtation, Carlo proposes marriage, but after some prevarication Clelia rejects the proposal, citing too great a difference of lifestyles and expectations. Both Pavese's novel and Antonioni's film are supposed to reveal the myth of a homogeneous postwar Italy, elucidating class differences and the fallacy of attributing war guilt to members of other classes (Binetti, 2003, p. 202). *Le amiche* was a critical success, winning the *Leone d'argento* at the 1955 Venice Film Festival. Popular reception was more muted, recording box-office takings of 256,740,000 (Chiti & Pioppi, 1991, p. 31). The film's less enthusiastic popular reception may be because of what Antonioni came to later call its *freddezza morale*, shot through with *ennui* in the form of ambiguous and unsatisfying characters and narrative. Space came to be particularly important to Antonioni's films, and *Le amiche* has been praised for the 'subtlety of its spatial disposition' (Chatman, 1985, p. 36).

As a note on the films' genres and spectatorships, it is interesting to observe Paulicelli's assertion that films were, for 'Italian working-class women, particularly dress-makers, traditionally [...] a "source of inspiration"' (Paulicelli, cited in Hipkins, 2016, p. 63), begging the question, who were these films for? Hipkins notes the predominance of women in wartime and melodramatic audiences, and we should pause to highlight the 'woman's film' genre with which we could categorise all of the films under study. Woman's film is 'distinguished by its female protagonist, female point of view and a narrative which most often revolves around the traditional realm of women's experience: the familial, the domestic, the romantic' (Hipkins, 2016, p. 32). The fact that these films may actually have been trying to speak to women – if not working women – reminds us of the interaction between cultural materials, and individual and collective identities.

⁹⁵ *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* also featured popular actors such as Marcello Mastroianni, Eduardo De Filippo, and Renato Salvatori, who may have acted as a draw for audiences.

⁹⁶ *Tra donne sole* is the final instalment in Pavese's three-part series *La Bella Estate* (1949).

Physical Space

The most direct expression of an individual's space is the physical space and place that they occupy. Feminist geographers Doreen Massey and Gillian Rose have studied women's access to and occupation of space, particularly noting the divisions between private and public. Portrayals of working women in specific spaces and places illustrate 'dimensions along which run relations of power and control, or dominance and subordination' (Massey, 1994, p. 88). If we can assert that women's visibility in new spaces caused anxiety, examining portrayals of working women who occupy these new spaces helps us understand the environmental, economic, social, political, and cultural changes occurring in post-World War Two Italian society. Portrayals of the physical space occupied by *sarte* are important because they provide the canvas upon which new notions of nation are depicted.

In this period most tailoring work was undertaken as piecework and completed by domestic workers. The *sarte* represented in these films are remarkable because they work in professional urban spaces. As noted in the introduction to these chapters, the structures in which the *sarte* worked were often divided between workroom (private), salon (semi-public), and exterior (public). The *sarte* moved between these public and private spaces in a way which would have been impossible without their professional status. This provides a counterpoint to the work of domestic *sarte* which was ““invisibile” e non “memorabile” per il grosso della società perché descritto come domestico, privato, a domicilio’ (Maher, 2007, pp. 83-84). Recalling Pateman's affirmation that women's occupation of the public sphere has been the core concern of feminism, we can assert that the professional *sarte* of these films occupy public spaces, challenging patriarchal gender norms. It is perhaps for this reason that the *sarte* gained visibility in film of this period.

In *Sorelle Materassi*, the sisters are *sarte* and own their own business. Their *sartoria* echoes a model which Imprenti describes as a ‘laboratorio piccolissimo’, employing fewer than five workers (Imprenti, 2007).⁹⁷ It has the structure of a classic rural *atelier*; the sisters live in a small town on the outskirts of Florence and the *atelier* is actually a part of their home. Their workroom is also where clients are received and measured, blurring the line between private and public. Similarly, the sisters' roles as owners and workers converge and we see them both measuring clients, cutting material and handing out tasks to their young employee Laurina. Such tasks would, in a larger workplace or a more industrialised model, have been divided between different grades of employee. This spatial location of the sisters as domestic workers tallies with the reassuring gender stereotypes to be found in this film; professional identity is downplayed, and the ‘association of feminine with the home’ (Rose, 1993, p. 60) is reassured.

⁹⁷ This model of business also falls into the category of *artigianato* which, although covered by collective contracts on clothing businesses, did not come in for the same amount of scrutiny as larger enterprises. Workforces also often comprised family members or friends, and for these reasons it can be expected that employees of these small businesses enjoyed less protection and regulation than those in larger ones.

Recalling the 1943 release date of this film, we might argue that in a context of increased visibility for female professionals, this film provides a reassuringly domesticised vision of women's work.

Conversely, the *sarte* in *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* are unmistakably urban *sarte*, and their workspace is clearly divided between public and private. The setting for the *sarte*'s workspace was borrowed from the Sorelle Fontana, who also provided advice to the director.⁹⁸ Many features of the set indicate a strict spatial division between private (*laboratorio*) and public (salon, exterior). The *atelier* environment is ordered and hospitable, with women grouped around long tables in a small, minimally-furnished space.



Figure 24 The atelier space in *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*

The environment of the *laboratorio* is not only a safe space where women collaborate, but there are elements of the space which actually suggest gender role reversal. Whereas the *mondine* are commanded by a male *caporale* surveilling them with a long wooden stick, the *sarte*'s *laboratorio* is managed by a diminutive but assertive young woman. Pictures of male celebrities are pasted on the walls, not only increasing our impression of a female-gendered space, but one where women reverse an objectifying male gaze. Maher notes that 'the atelier was perceived as a place of "perdition," "equivocal," suggest[ing] that here we are dealing with a social space that was anomalous and interstitial with respect to social structure' (Maher, 1987, p. 138). Filmic portrayals support Maher's statement and imply a transfer of power to women in their workspace.

⁹⁸ The *atelier Sorelle Fontana* was one of Rome's most successful and celebrated fashion houses in the 1950s. The Fontana sisters themselves are said to have been involved in the production of the film; fashion historian Rossana Bossaglia describes how 'mentre il film [...] veniva girato, una della Sorelle Fontana (Micol probabilmente) secondo Flamini era costantemente presente sul set' (Bossaglia, 1984, p. 69).

However, outside the *atelier* is a busy urban street with thick passing traffic and pedestrians. The threat of the outside space is made evident; at the entrance of the *atelier* the girls stick close together, and when they are left alone they are immediately subjected to invasive male gazes and catcalls.



Figure 25 The urban space outside the atelier dominated by men in Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna

We see this trope of the sexualising and harassing of women in the public space repeated in a later scene in Villa Borghese when the protagonists are pursued by dozens of preying men.



Figure 26 Men pursue the female protagonists of Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna in Villa Borghese

The *laboratorio* and cloakroom are elevated above street level with a window from whence the women look down, watching for the arrival of suitors.



Figure 27 Elena and Lucia gaze out of the atelier window in *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*

Like nuns gazing from convent towers, the women are concealed but able to observe the scene below, underlining their reluctance to enter (or *be seen in*) the urban space alone. The contrast between public and work spaces creates a dichotomy between the utopian female universe of the workroom and the implicit threat of the public urban space. If it is true that ‘unequal class relations do not, as the saying goes, exist on the head of a pin [but] are organised spatially’ (Massey, 1994, p. 87), the spatial organisation of the *sarte*’s workplaces suggest that men still rule the public urban space and pose a threat to women working within them.

The women of *Le amiche* are also presented in environments which are clearly divided between private workspaces and public urban spaces. As in *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*, the workplace is portrayed as a cossetted female universe. Interestingly, it is Clelia who has to enact this process of feminising the workplace. When she first arrives, the *sartoria* is still under construction, and the barrier between public and private is but a flimsy layer of scaffolding. This pressing-in of the male public sphere is made explicit by the construction workers who objectify and patronise Clelia. She has to fight for dominance in this space, resisting being gendered by Cesare who comments on her physical appearance and youth and asks if she has children. Within this space, Clelia states ‘preferisco contare sulle mie forze’, instating an independence and autonomy in her work role. The feminisation of the *sartoria* is an explicit focus of the narrative. Much is made of the necessity for the *sartoria* to reflect the aesthetic elegance of its female occupants. Clelia states that ‘il nostro è un ufficio per modo di dire. Deve avere un carattere’, emphasising the impossibility of women’s workspaces being purely professional. When Clelia later returns to the *sartoria* after a trying day with the suicidal Rosetta she tells Carlo ‘ho avuto bisogno di tornare a casa’. Once the space is fashioned into femininity it becomes a space where women have emotional conversations (such as that between Nene and Rosetta about their mutual love for Lorenzo). Only female

characters move between the public and private spaces of salon and workroom uninhibited. Again, the *sartoria* is rendered a feminine space where women can occupy dominant roles and find a sense of identity and intimacy. Yet, there is also an implicit threat in the portrayal of exclusively female spaces: Mariella comments of Momina's home, 'in una casa dove vive una donna sola [...] pare sempre di fare una cosa che non si deve', highlighting the anxiety-inducing potential of female-only spaces. When the architect Cesare transgresses the boundaries of this female space and enters into the workroom he causes immediate disarray and implied sexual threat, asking 'non avete mai visto un uomo vestito'? This scene recalls Hipkins' analysis of *Noi vivi* (Alessandrini, 1942) where men entering a woman's space 'can permit access to her interiority, as well as her absent naked body' (Hipkins, 2016, p. 58).

The urban settings of these films are also fundamental to articulating ideas of national change and concerns over women's new professional visibility. As noted in chapters 1 and 2 on the *mondine*, women were often used as symbols of the nation. The 1950s marked the rise of the city space in Italy. Particularly from 1955 there was a 'massive *rural* exodus in all parts of the peninsula' (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 219) and 'the major cities of Italy were transformed by this sudden influx' (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 220). While this shift represented opportunity and affluence for many, it also caused significant social angst. Women in the city space are key to this symbolism and are used, as Vincenzo Binetti argues of Pavese's writing, to articulate 'a new "patria" and a more credible national identity' (Binetti, 2003, p. 202). The link between 'new' womanhood and the urban space is principally due to the increased mobility which cities gave women; including wider economic, professional, social, sexual, cultural, and spatial opportunities. Maher remarks upon the *motilità* of *sarte*, and how 'the streets and squares in Italy are where the social order is represented, mocked, undermined, and renegotiated' (Maher, 1987, p. 139). *Sarte*'s professions enabled them to cross and inhabit such public spaces. The result of this is twofold: one outcome, Binetti argues, is that women are able to find "'other" paths through which they express their identities' (Binetti, 2003, p. 207), but Wilson cautions that women in the city 'symbolised the promise of sexual adventure. This promise was converted into a more general moral and political threat' (Wilson, 1991, 6). The rest of this section assesses how the films present the links between women in the city space and modernity, sexuality, opportunity, and threat.

Even in the most rural of our examples, *Sorelle Materassi*, the sisters have increased physical mobility. In contrast, the sisters' non-*sarta* sister, Giselda, has no *motilità* whatsoever; she is only shown within the house, either gazing out from behind shuttered windows, or languishing in bed. Giselda provides a counterpoint to the sisters, suggesting the greater degree of mobility which the sisters' profession affords them. The sisters' greatest moments of mobility occur in urban spaces, the most important of which is their visit to Rome to meet the Pope. In a later scene, the sisters are taken to dinner in Florence by Remo. Both of these occasions mark moments of joy and honour for the sisters. However, just before we are able to glimpse the sisters being received by the Pope, the scene is crosscut with an upshot of a speeding train containing Remo, a symbol of urbanity, threat, and corruption. In the case of their visit to Florence, the

sisters are intimidated and mocked by the urbanite Florentine customers. These scenes mimic a longstanding exclusion of the rural from modernity; the rural sisters are comically outmoded and ill-fated in the urban space. Both of these examples suggest an incongruity of women in the urban space which ties in with Fascist idealisation of rural femininity.

Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna, is set in Rome, 'at the core of all [...] dreams of rebirth in Western culture' (Jeannet, 2003, p. 99). This is even truer for Rome of the 1950s, capital of a nation in (re)construction. As well as in its title, the mise-en-scène underlines the women's urban environment, picturing them urban locations like Villa Borghese, Termini station, and at dances, bicycle races, and the zoo. The link between the urban environment and the *motilità* of the characters is shown by their respective journeys from work to their homes; Lucia and Elena walk alone or accompanied by male suitors through recognisably urban settings, and Marisa travels in a motorcar with her boyfriend Augusto. The women gain not only spatial independence in this journey through their urban setting, but also, we are shown, greater social and sexual freedom. As Chiara Saraceno explains, in modern urban environments privacy was only possible in public spaces (Saraceno, 1988); this is exactly the case in *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*, in which each of the women is able to engage in unsupervised contact with male suitors in the very public setting of their daily commute. These portrayals equate shifting sexual and gender behaviours with the city space.

Their urban setting allows the *sarte* a *motilità* which is not only spatial and sexual but specifically *modern*. Frames such as the one picturing Lucia being carried off by a boyfriend on a bicycle under the shadow of a departing aeroplane make semiotic associations between women, modernity, leisure, and the urban space.



Figure 28 Lucia and her suitor on a bicycle under the shadow of an aeroplane in *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*

Similarly, there are detailed references to geographically modern features of urban Rome. The film specifies the train which Lucia takes to get home – ‘la Littorina delle sette e trentacinque dalla stazione Termini’, and makes reference to locations such as Capannelle and Garbatella. These are all recognisably modern features of the city: the Littorina was a new kind of train introduced to Rome in 1933 which could travel at speeds of up to one hundred kilometres per hour, and Capannelle and Garbatella were both constructed in the 1920s to the South and South-East of Rome respectively.

The equation of city, women, and modernity is problematised. Elena is shown to be coerced by her boyfriend Alberto, who leads her off the urban and moral map and into illicit spaces and sexual behaviours. She pleads with him, ‘mamma mi aspetta sempre con una faccia [...] prometti che non facciamo tardi’, highlighting the digression from sexual and moral norms and the generational split of modernity. Using dramatic irony, the audience is aware before Elena that Alberto is not a *tipo per bene*, and that he is only interested in Elena if he can acquire her mother's flat as their marital home. Elena eventually discovers his duplicity in the ultra-urban setting of the central train station. When she subsequently attempts suicide, it is in the warehouse of the *sartoria*, linking her peril to the urban setting. We can observe how portrayals of women in the city are linked to their greater sexual liberty in these films, and how this liberty is converted to threat and disaster, as Wilson predicts (1991, p. 6). Angela Jeannet argues of women's fiction of Rome that location is used to underline a ‘solidly present, slowly changing [...] city’ (Jeannet, 2003, p. 102). The same is true of these filmic portrayals of working women in Rome; their presence and mobility in the city draws spectators' attention to the changing social dynamics of the modern city and thus to the postwar nation.

Le amiche's representation of women in the urban space is more ambiguous. The film was made using real locations in Turin, ‘a city in itself rife with internal contradictions’ (Binetti, 2003, p. 201) between a politicised working class and a powerful bourgeoisie. These contradictions are embodied by the originally working-class Clelia, and the bored aristocratic characters of Momina (Yvonne Furneaux) and her entourage. The city setting highlights Clelia's social *motilità* within the urban space. When she visits the working-class neighbourhood where she grew up, Carlo tells her (and the audience) ‘non abiti più in posti come questo’, underlining the social and spatial transition she has made thanks to her profession. Clelia is often pictured in her urban surroundings: in cafés, restaurants and walking through Turin's streets. Like *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*, *Le amiche* also associates women's urban setting with greater freedom and modernity. For example, the urbane Momina emerges into the narrative from the urban environment outside Clelia's hotel. She leads Clelia from the private space of the hotel and into the city outside. The urban space is again linked to modernity when Momina indicates her motor car waiting outside at the same time as she reveals her unconventional marriage arrangement saying ‘vivo sola, è meglio per lui e per me’. The women travel through the city alone, not only moving but *driving themselves* through the narrative, recalling Binetti's argument that women in the city space are offered alternative narrative paths (Binetti, 2003, p. 207). The city space also provides the opportunity to portray characters moving across diverse

class spaces. Clelia not only attends soirées in the *atelier* and art galleries, but contrastingly visits a reclaimed furniture yard and a shabby *rosticceria* with Carlo. Of this occurrence Carlo exclaims, ‘non credevo che lei venisse in un posto così’, alluding to what Binetti calls the ‘impossibility of [Clelia] establishing a harmonic relationship either with “her” city, this being the poor proletarian quarter she came from, or with the empty and false aristocratic community of Turin’ (Binetti, 2003, p. 205). Clelia’s ultimate estrangement from both old and new Turin problematises the social mobility available to women in the urban space. The urban setting, with its variety of spaces and places, shows women as spatially and socially mobile, but casts a shadow over their being so, as they ultimately become rudderless nomads.

Recalling Elizabeth Wilson’s observation that women in the urban space represent sexual adventure and moral threat (Wilson, 1991, 6), we can observe how the city and its inhabitants are linked to public spaces, sexual liberty, and corruption in *Le amiche*. Most of the characters’ significant moments of sexual transgression occur in the public space: Rosetta and Lorenzo begin their affair on the city’s outskirts along the banks of the River Po, Mariella seduces Cesare on the beach, and Clelia leaves Carlo in the train station. Even when Momina and Cesare become lovers we are shown the scene from the outside looking in, through the window in an up-shot from street level.



Figure 29 Momina and Cesare embrace in her flat in *Le amiche*

The perspective is that of an anonymous suitor who, at street level, emerges from the city space to seduce Momina’s maid while Momina is occupied with Cesare.



Figure 30 Below, Momina's maid carries on her own sexual transgression in *Le amiche*

It seems that the city space represents the opportunity for transgression, but still only in hyper-public settings. Momina draws our attention to the precarious nature of public displays of female sexuality, saying 'secondo me se un uomo ti bacia in pubblico vuol dire che non sente niente'. In a latter scene the group arrives at an urban restaurant where Lorenzo observes the proximity of a brothel. Binetti notes of *Tra donne sole* that the city is 'reduced to an almost infernal landscape [...] within which the community of women becomes emblematically equated [...] to the level of prostitutes' (Binetti, 2003, p. 206). To return to Wood's work on portrayals of women in the '40s and '50s we see how cinema shows women's entry into new spaces and places 'as profoundly disorientating' (Wood, 2006, pp. 60-1). Nowhere is this more evident than in the hyper-public urban setting of Rosetta's suicide. She is first pictured running down a dark urban alleyway to her death, and finally framed in a high-angle shot where a crowd gathers to watch her body being collected.



Figure 31 Rosetta flees despairingly into the urban space in Le amiche



Figure 32 Rosetta's body is collected in the hyper-public city space in Le amiche

The physical spaces and mobility which the *sarte* enjoy emerge as both emancipatory and transgressive in these films; offering a degree of – often problematised - sexual, social, and spatial freedom. This recalls Wood's observation that in this period of profound social change films allowed 'a wide variety of male and female roles, successful and unsuccessful to be rehearsed' (Wood, 2006, p. 60).

Ideological Space

Space is not just about physical setting but 'reflect[s] back at us also – and in the process reinforce[s] – other characteristics of social relations, among them those of gender' (Massey, 1994, p. 183). This chapter now examines the metaphysical spaces of *sarte* in film, looking at the moral, sexual, and economic attitudes that are attributed to seamstresses, and how these reflect the modernising character of the spaces they inhabit. Maher notes that 'le sarte furono in prima fila nell'entusiasarsi per i nuovi modi di vivere' (Maher, 2007, pp. 17-18). This embrace of novelty was a serious point of contention in post-World War Two Italy where new 'ideas of the development of the economy and society clashed with those of Catholic integralism, which emphasized the need for society to correspond to and reflect Catholic values' (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 154). Images of the working woman are a site where this tension between Catholic morality and modernity is extrapolated. Catholic ideals of femininity remained decidedly traditional in the postwar (Dipartimento di Pedagogia dell'Università Cattolica di Milano, 1988, p. 278). Exemplifying this, Maher explains how even in post-World War Two Italy 'tutte le parti – socialisti, chiesa cattolica, regime fascista – si trovavano concordi [...] sulla condanna delle sarte', particularly in their own clothing, their love of dance, and their relationships with male students (Maher, 2007, p. 18). This chapter looks for expressions of the clash of modernity and traditionalism in the representation of filmic *sarte*.

In *Sorelle Materassi*, the two sisters are shown to have led exemplary moral lives, having worked themselves out of debt and never having been tempted into supposedly immoral behaviour. Indeed, when their apprentice Laurina becomes pregnant with Remo's child and confesses this to the sisters, their initial reaction is astonishment rather than outrage. Carolina expresses her incomprehension saying, 'anche noi siamo delle ragazze. Abbiamo avuto vent'anni, e mai nessuno [ha avuto] nulla a che dire sul nostro conto, nessuno', with Teresa adding 'e mai siamo rimaste *incinte*, caspita!'. Their naivety is further demonstrated by their clichéd ideas as to whom the father of Laurina's baby might be. Teresa speculates, 'del lattaio? Del postino?'.

Other examples of their piousness are manifested in their religious behaviour. The sisters are shown to be religious, proudly and obsequiously making garments for the local priest and even being invited to Rome to be received by the Pope for their services to the church.⁹⁹ Despite religion apparently being a staple feature of *sarte*'s lives, and one that was socially and morally 'correct', the films present a rather disparaging vision of their religiousness. Rather than being portrayed as heroines of moral femininity, as we might expect, the sisters' virginal states and monastic behaviour are ridiculed throughout the film. Their sister Giselda says of them 'voi non sapete cosa sono le braccia di un uomo [...] Respirate ma non vivete. I balli, i teatri, le sensazioni d'arte, i viaggi, l'amore. Che cosa ne sapete di queste cose?',

⁹⁹ Historical materials suggest that religion was an important part of life for real-life *sarte*; the *Sorelle Materassi* actually foreshadow the invitation of the Sorelle Fontana to visit the Pope in 1957 where they were given one of his skullcaps. Maugeri states that at the Bolognese *sartoria* of Maria Venturi 'prima di tagliare, si faceva sempre il segno della croce' (Maugeri, 2012, p. 18).

suggesting that their traditional values have in fact robbed them of the stuff of life. They are similarly mocked for being virgins by their housemaid Niobe, who, when the sisters remark upon the fact that they can wear orange blossom on Remo's wedding day, says 'alla vostra età potete portare anche le arance'. Indeed the climax of the film, Remo's marriage, is a moment of hyperbolic ridicule of the sisters, in which they arrive at the ceremony also dressed as brides, to the hilarity and scorn of the local population.

Although we might anticipate some tension in a film made during Fascism around the figure of the unmarried woman, such explicit ridicule of the celibate woman is surprising. Indeed, if we transposed the sisters into nuns, it seems unlikely that their behaviour would elicit such humour. We might hypothesise that although the sisters' choice to remain chaste and single was theoretically moral, for an audience of that time it would be a mark of alterity, and was perhaps just as destabilising to gender norms as the women who transgress them completely. It may also be that 'each character – especially Teresa and Carolina [...] – is drawn in caricature to the straining point of credibility' (Landy, 1992, p. 290), and that this caricaturing allows us to observe a *distacco* between theoretical moral ideologies and those which really functioned and were responded to by audiences in 1940s Italy. Although Catholicism was a powerful influence in Fascist Italy, Fascist ideology expounded the ideal of the productive and reproductive woman above that of the morally intact *zitella*. De Grazia quotes Mussolini as saying of the working woman, 'in the general scheme of things her work is a source of political and moral bitterness' (De Grazia, 1992, p. 168), and discusses how work for women was seen as itinerant to the full-time 'employment' of motherhood.¹⁰⁰ To a wartime audience, the Materassi sisters transgressed on two counts; as childless, working, women.

Responding to Maher's assertion that *sarte* were particularly infamous for dancing and fraternising with men, I note that *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* includes three dance scenes, all of which suggest a threat to the social order. As in chapters 1 and 2, dance is a vehicle for discussions of female sexuality, morality, and modernity. Lucia is shown at a Sunday open-air dance with a man she meets on her journey home. Her suitor fails to buy the correct tickets and is expelled, immediately after which Lucia is grabbed by a strange man and embroiled in a fight. The context of the dance is imbued with references to modernity, including the Coca Cola signs on the walls and the intradiegetic American-style rockabilly music.

¹⁰⁰ Mussolini stated 'work, where it is not a direct impediment, distracts from conception. It forms an independence and consequent physical and moral habits contrary to child bearing' (Mussolini, 'Macchina e donna', *Opera omnia*, XXI, p. 311, cited in Alexander De Grand, 2000, pp. 957-58).



Figure 33 A Coca-Cola sign adorns the walls of a dance venue in Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna

At the very moment the band switches from an Italian to an American song the crisis breaks. This fits with David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle's argument that American boogie-woogie is imagined to have a corrupting influence on Italian youth (Forgacs & Gundle, 2008, p. 64). The scene closes with Lucia departing through a landscape marked by ancient ruins and electricity pylons.



Figure 34 Lucia cycles through a landscape of ancient ruins and electricity pylons in Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna

This frame mirrors the dissonances between old and new moralities and landscapes. The next dance scene shows Marisa in the luxurious setting of a fashion show dancing with an unknown man. In the next shot, she stumbles drunkenly out of the venue and is whisked away in his convertible. The threat of this situation is underlined by Lucia, who immediately hails a taxi and gives chase to the couple in a car chase, anxiously

asking the unwitting driver (Mastroianni) ‘ma non li legge lei i giornali? Tutti i giorni delitti, ammazzamenti, rapine, ricatti’. Again, dance is associated with unchecked female sexual liberty, which in turn leads to danger and disaster. In the final dance scene, Elena and good-guy traditionalist Marcello (previously Lucia’s taxi driver) dance together, employing a conspicuously traditional style against the background of other dancers doing the boogie-woogie to fast-paced music. Marcello observes ‘non sono molto adatto a questo tipo di ballo’, marking him out as traditional and – by merit of his precipitous marriage proposal – virtuous. As I argued in Chapter 1, dance scenes are used to represent moments of moral panic over female sexuality and modernity.

Le amiche’s Clelia also transgresses Catholic sexual morality. Interestingly, the Clelia of Antonioni is less sexually transgressive than that of Pavese, leading Binetti to argue that Pavese’s Clelia presents the ‘profound conflicts of a “modernity”’ (Binetti, 2003, p. 209) which Antonioni arguably articulates through other female characters. This table shows the dilution of Clelia’s sexual behaviour between novel and film:

Clelia – Pavese’s novel	Clelia – Antonioni’s film
Has sex with the architect (Febo) and his assistant	Kisses architect’s assistant (Carlo)
Goes out alone with a variety of men	Socialises in female or mixed groups
Refers to previous sexual relationships, suggests a lesbian relationship between Momina and Rosetta	Does not mention sex at any point
Chooses to stay single, rejects the idea of motherhood.	Chooses to stay single, but says that she should have married younger

Although Antonioni’s Clelia hints at sexuality, she fails to push it to definitively transgressive conclusions, unlike Pavese’s protagonist.

Clelia’s sexual choices are intrinsically linked to her professional choices in the film, presenting romantic and professional fulfilment as mutually exclusive. Clelia argues ‘lavorare è anche il mio modo di essere donna, di partecipare alla vita’, and is permitted to return to Rome and continue her satisfying and socially and economically rewarding work. Yet Clelia’s choice of work over romance is suggested to be a cause of regret or resignation to her, having wrongly passed up the chance to exist in the conventional sexual space of marriage. The film was only allowed to be shown to over-sixteens in 1955, and the scene showing Cesare and Mariella embracing on the beach was cut in the televised version released in 1978, as

was the scene in the train where Rosetta and Clelia discuss the pointlessness of life (Italia Taglia, 2018). This censorship points to an Italy still beholden to Catholic values of female chastity and the condemnation of suicide.

Like representations of the *sarte's* sexual behaviours, their economic independence could similarly be read as a source of tension in the films. Female financial independence was uncommon in this period, and even where women worked Perry Willson notes that 'their wages (too low to permit them to live independently) were often essential to maintain dependants' (Willson, 2010, p. 73) and so would be channelled back into the family space. In *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* there are recurrent references to women's earnings. We see both Elena and Marisa handing over their pay to their mothers, and Elena explicitly discusses with Alberto how much money she has saved. Clelia's affluence is similarly drawn to audiences' attention in *Le amiche* by other characters' admiration of her fine clothing. Yet, both Elena and Clelia's economic independence is tempered with disastrous narrative outcomes. Elena's financial resources attract the exploitative Alberto who only wishes to marry Elena for her thrifty situation, and Clelia's wealth is shown to rob her of the possibility of a traditional destiny as 'una moglie tranquilla in una casa modesta'. Willson notes that women's work was often intertwined with anxiety about their financial independence (Willson, 2010, p. 123). This is evident in these films; Elena seeks to reassure Alberto's concern about her independence by saying 'per il corredo se ne andranno così senza accorgersi' and Clelia is unable to fulfil her implied gendered destiny of marriage.

Women's financial gain is also elided with a sale of their sexuality. Particularly in Marisa's case, her promotion to *indossatrice* causes Augusto to characterise her as a prostitute. Mirroring this, Marisa's mother tells the story of how – against her husband's wishes – she modelled nude for a painter in her youth, using the money to buy herself a sewing machine. This episode highlights women as canny and treacherous, with Marisa's mother saying 'intanto sapevo che al museo il tuo padre non ci sarebbe andato mai!' Their exchange of the body for financial profit is shown as breaking the sacred patriarchal hierarchy and nuclear family unit. This incident also serves to destabilise traditional masculinity. Marisa's father could be likened to the 'melo-male' identified by Claudio Bioni, with his 'low levels of familial authoritarianism' (Bioni, 2015, p. 241), a fact which is underlined by his exclamation about his role in the domestic space, 'cosa credi, che comando io qui dentro?'. These portrayals link women's financial endeavour to deceit and destruction and encroachment on masculinity, male power, and male spaces, foreshadowing Hipkins' observation that economically independent women must always 'pay the price' with a disastrous narrative arc (Hipkins, 2007, p. 101).

Social Capital in Film

Pierre Bourdieu stated that ‘there is no space, in a hierarchical society, which is not hierarchised and which does not express social hierarchies’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 11), and nowhere is that clearer than in representations of the *sarte*’s social spaces. Bourdieu’s concept of space expressing hierarchies marries with his notion of social capital, neatly summarised in the truism that it’s not what you know, it’s who you know. Bourdieu asserts that social capital is ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships’ (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248). The *sarte*’s workspace was organised so that they often came into contact with individuals of other classes, particularly if they were in the upper echelons of the *sarte* who designed, measured or modelled. Even junior *sarte* could expect to make deliveries or assist superiors, bringing them into contact with people of different classes. In addition, Maher observes that post-World War Two Italy had strict vestimentary class codes, and that through their work, the *sarte* had the advantage of being ‘esperte nelle questioni di status, che traducevano in un codice di abbigliamento’ (Maher, 2007, p. 25).¹⁰¹ This penultimate section examines *sarte* in relation to Bourdieu’s notion that ‘nonmonetary forms can be important sources of power and influence, like the size of one’s stock holdings or bank account’ (Portes, 1998, p. 2).

The *sarte* of postwar Italy had a powerful role in class negotiation. Lois Banner, scholar of American women’s history, notes that ‘the obsession with fashion among American women in the nineteenth century has been attributed to the high level of “status competition” engendered by “the fluidity of American society, the universal striving after success, and the lack of a titled aristocracy”’ (Banner in Crane, 2001, p. 5). It is not hard to transpose this situation to post-World War Two Italy in the years of the new Republic and the lead-up to the economic boom. Banner’s sentiment is almost exactly echoed by one of the *sarte* interviewed in Chapter 4 who observes, ‘i clienti degli anni sessanta, era il boom. Tutti quanti volevano arrivare chissà dove [...] quindi la gente spendeva, la gente sperimentava, voleva cose nuove’ (Coppola, 2016). As a result of socio-economic circumstances, I argue that *sarte* occupied a specifically modern position during the postwar period, aiding and propounding a new social system, in which fashion was one form of currency. As Maher observes, ‘non solo la sarta è in grado di collocare simbolicamente la cliente nell’ambito del sistema sociale, ma, diversamente da molti altri membri della propria classe, sa benissimo come tali simboli vanno usati nelle diverse situazioni, qual’è il contegno che si accompagna all’abbigliamento’ (Maher, 2007, p. 26). Through their work therefore, *sarte* are equipped for social mobility, and therefore able to harness this social mobility for themselves.

The clearest example of fashion increasing the social mobility of its employees is to be found in *Le amiche*. It is plainly stated that Clelia left Turin as a working-class young woman and returned (thanks to her professional success in fashion) as the equal of characters ‘di ottima famiglia’ like Rosetta Savoni, or the wealthy Momina Di Stefani, both of whose surnames connote noble heritage. Clelia’s social ascent is marked by Momina’s observation of her elegance, saying ‘di solito le sarte vestono come straccioni’. It is

¹⁰¹ Elsewhere, Ellen Scott (2013) discusses representations of black seamstresses in 1930s American film and the social mobility their sartorial knowledge gave them.

interesting to note the 'star signification' of Eleonora Rossi Drago, which colours audiences' perceptions of characters according to Richard Dyer (1998, p. 1). Like Clelia, Rossi Drago had undergone a similar social transformation in her personal life. Rossi Drago was a single mother who was disqualified from a Miss Italia competition for being too old, began her career as a salesclerk and *indossatrice*, and ended up a rich and successful actress (Masi & Lancia, 1998, p. 78). This star signification reinforces the narrative importance of Clelia's social mobility. Tonino Cervi is quoted as saying of Rossi Doria that 'elle fréquentait les riches car elle pensait que, de cette façon, elle pourrait profiter de leur confiance' (Masi & Lancia, 1998, p. 78), her personal behaviour thus mirroring Clelia's. Ultimately, Clelia's access to Turin's bourgeoisie is a deception; unable to return to her 'natural' class, she is disillusioned and alienated by her new upper-class milieu. Clelia's portrayal reminds us of Bourdieu's theory of habitus where subjects produce an 'avoir devenu être' ['having become to be'] (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 4) of their social class, embodying the codes and comportments appropriate to it. Clelia is unable to fully internalise the habitus of her new milieu, and is thus forever marked as an intruder.

Marisa, similarly, is shown to struggle to adopt the habitus of her new class. She comments that her role as model is not simply a matter of *being*, but of *becoming*. She cites *Madame's* assertion that 'avere il fisico non basta: ti devi coltiva', istruì, leggere, cerca a parla' meglio'. This statement almost precisely echoes Bourdieu's argument that 'the acquisition of social capital requires deliberate investment of both economic and cultural resources' (Portes, 1998, p. 4). Marisa delivers this affirmation in her strong Roman accent, underlining the contradiction of her original and performed social identities. Her social ascent is made to seem ridiculous in scenes where she barter with a bookseller, asking 'e che sono, d'oro?', and when she returns from her first trip outside Rome and declares 'quando uno ha vissuto, ha letto, ha girato il mondo, capisce che l'amore è una sciocchezza'. In this scene, Marisa clings to her suitcase, that 'obsessively familiar motif in Italian melodrama' (Hipkins, 2016, p. 62) for the prostitute, able to articulate angst over women's mobility. In the scene when Marisa goes dancing after a fashion show, she is *loaned* a dress, suggesting the temporary nature of her new status. When she returns home drunk after her night in high society, we note the incongruity of her expensive dress and the working-class setting of the Garbatelle.



Figure 35 Lucia returns to Garbatelle after a ball in *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*

Hipkins reads this technique as ‘connoting the wearer’s dislocation with their origins’ (Hipkins, 2016, p. 62). These scenes suggest that Marisa’s new identity and social mobility is a fallacy. Her occupation of new social spaces causes the crisis around which her narrative turns. She is alienated from her family and future in the form of fiancé Augusto, who observes of her new status, ‘per lei c’è uno ricco, un signore’, and leaves her.

Social capital in the films is shown to be a part of *sarte*’s professions, but one which is fraught with danger. ‘Bourdieu uses the term “fatal attraction” to refer to the physical beauty which inspires cross-class relationships and disrupts mechanisms of social class closure’ (Shilling, 2012, p. 124). We see a similar fatalism in representations of *sarte*’s social mobility. Binetti invites us to read *Tra donne sole* as a parody of postwar Italy, in crisis between old identities and attractive but ultimately empty modern prospects. The same could be argued of the protagonists of *Le amiche* and *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*, where new social spaces for women are ultimately shown to be vapid and treacherous.

Social mobility is also expressed in the films through the use of the camera’s gaze. As both Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault observe, there is a power dynamic behind the act of gazing. Not only does the gaze ‘look, it also shows’ (Lacan, 1981, p. 75), and it is the use of the gaze that articulates the spatio-social inequalities to which Massey refers (Massey, 1994, p. 87). Lacan describes an incident of gazing on a sardine can in the ocean, and being asked by a fisherman, ‘you see that can? [...] Well it doesn’t see you!’ (Lacan, 1981, p. 95). The message Lacan derives from this incident is the discomfort of occupying the superior, more knowledgeable, position of the subject of the gaze. Crucially, Lacan links this incident to class dynamics and the ‘lurking political guilt at his own privileged position in relation to the working class fishermen’ (Krips, 2010, p. 92). Similarly, Foucault described the Panopticon (Foucault, 1977) where individuals assimilate the knowledge of being constantly watched. Both of these commentaries assert the unequal power relations which are expressed and reinforced by the gaze. Maher notes that the *sarte* are educated in a gaze, and that ‘questo sguardo sia una pratica legata a un certo *stile di pensiero* sociale [...]. In questo senso, l’attenzione per l’abbigliamento fa parte di un sistema di conoscenze, giudizi, valori, che crea

e struttura i legami sociali' (Maher, 2007, p. 28). In *Le amiche*, Clelia underlines her knowledge of strict vestimentary social codes, explaining to *Madame*, 'a Roma le signore vogliono spendere poco e sembrare ricche, qui invece spendono molto ma vogliono sembrare dimesse, semplici'. When asked why she says simply, 'diplomazia sociale'. Statements such as this portray the *sarte* as knowing subjects of gaze dynamics, commanding a nuanced understanding of the fashioning of symbolic capital, and how to employ this for their own ends. In other words, the gaze is a vehicle by which class demarcations are drawn.

In *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* there are key moments of gaze which underline and problematise class issues and reinforce demarcations already remarked upon in my analysis of the *sarte*'s physical space. The first instance we see of characters gazing into different social spaces comes in the figure of Augusto. Emerging from the working-class space of the upstairs *laboratorio*, Augusto descends the staircase to the *sartoria*'s salon.



Figure 36 Augusto stops on the staircase of the atelier to gaze at Marisa in *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*

He is arrested, however, by the visual spectacle of Marisa modelling for clients and as he looks on the fracture in their social spaces is revealed. The effect is intensified by a mirror behind Augusto reflecting not him, but the scene below. Hipkins notes the presence of 'mirrors (plural)' in representations of the prostitute, perhaps to underline the objectifying intensity of the gaze. Similarly, there are two occasions in which Marisa is gazed upon by her fellow *sarte*, once by Elena who is entranced by Marisa as she tries on new designs.



Figure 37 Elena gazes at Lucia as she models garments in Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna

Elena wears an ambiguous expression, and the implicit comparison between the two women is intensified by Madam's dismissal of Elena, asking her 'ancora qui?'. Finally, when Marisa makes her public modelling debut, Lucia is pictured with two other women gazing down at her from a window above and serving as her dresser when she returns.



Figure 38 Lucia gazes at Marisa as she models at a ball in Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna

These scenes use the gaze to highlight the social alienation between subjects and objects of the gaze. These episodes recall Lacan's anecdote of the sardine can; the subject is conscious and moved by the spectacle of Marisa's social ascent, but she – as object – *does not see them*. It is the subject of the gaze who 'experiences a feeling of discomfort, which, rather than physiological in origin, is occasioned by a lurking

political guilt' (Krips, 2010, p. 92) at his class position and its dissonance with that of the object of the gaze. Maher argues that 'perhaps in Italy in general, part of the skill of self-presentation lies in trapping the glance of the passer-by and compelling respectful notice' (Maher, 1987, p. 139), by commanding a gaze, its object is empowered to new social standing.

Embodied Capital

As well as economic and social capital, *sarte* are shown as possessing and cultivating what Bourdieu calls embodied cultural capital. This refers to the process by which the body becomes 'a [...] possessor of power, status and distinctive symbolic forms which is integral to the accumulation of various resources and capital' (Shilling, 2012, pp. 111-2). I argue that this form of power is associated with modernity, because 'il doit être investi personnellement par l'investisseur (elle ne peut en effet s'effectuer par procuration [...]) Ce capital "personnel" ne peut être transmis instantanément [...] par le don ou la transmission héréditaire, l'achat ou l'échange' ['it has to be personally invested by the investor themselves (it cannot be got by procuration [...]) This "personal" capital cannot be instantly bestowed [...] by donation or inheritance, neither by buying or exchange'] (Bourdieu, 1979, pp. 3-4). In a context of increasing market liberalisation and loosening social and patriarchal hierarchies, embodied cultural capital mirrors a liberal system whereby conventionally disempowered parties could find opportunities for agency. Gundle notes that in post-World War Two Italy 'the prominence that beauty issues [...] acquired [...] meant that they were inevitably drawn into the broader political and cultural disputes that were dividing the country' (Gundle, 2007, p. 125), and Hipkins notes 'how clothing in filmic representations [...] in this period becomes the key factor in negotiating the relationship between female body, gender roles, and moral codes' (Hipkins, 2016, p. 55). Hipkins is looking at the specific case of prostitutes in postwar Italy, but her observation can be widened out to all women, where fashioning the body impacts upon women's agency and might empower them to diverse spaces and places. *Sarte*, whose very business is the elaboration of vestimentary identity and value, demonstrably manage the embodiment of capital not only for their clients, but also for themselves. Maher points out 'nei racconti delle sarte, ci sono molti accenni ai vantaggi sociali derivanti dalla bellezza, capitale fisico delle classe povere' (Maher, 2007, p. 180). It is important to acknowledge the opportunity and limits inherent in embodying capital, and the films studied here do just this. We have already seen in Chapters 1 and 2 how women's bodies are used as vehicles for national symbolism, this section looks at how women's bodies again express anxiety over social change.

Social ascent through the fashioned body was of concern to 1950s Italy, where 'the whole idea of beauty and of attractiveness was being redefined in a way that tended to displace traditional evaluations. A new emphasis was being placed on exterior appearance, on the physical, and on the whole body' (Forgacs & Gundle, 2008, p. 74). This was in contrast to Catholic doctrine which rejected 'the evaluation of beauty in

terms of exterior appearance' (Gundle, 2007, p. 126), meaning that embodied capital acquired a modern and transgressive character. A press article in the magazine *Il Sarto* notes the transgressive nature of the *sarte's* manipulation of physical appearance, describing how *sarte* 'godono di una stima, che è una disistima generale' (Imprenti, 2007, p. 169). Réka Buckley (2013) (2008) has written about the social ascent of Italian female stars of the 1940s and 1950s who used fashion and bodily transformation both on and off screen. Buckley underlines that gaining social mobility as a female star was not only about being attractive, but about being *fashioned*; she uses the examples of Lucia Bosè and Silvana Mangano and their transitions from *popolana* figures in the 1940s to aristocratic characters during the 1950s and beyond (Buckley, 2008). Buckley particularly underlines how important it was for social transformation to be embodied, using the example of Mangano who subjected herself to a punitive diet in order to shrink to a more fashionable frame. Eleonora Rossi Drago who plays Clelia in *Le amiche* underwent a similar process of refinement as an actress. Over the course of her career, she underwent three rhinoplasties, going on 'to star in urban dramas where awareness shifted to an emphasis on fashion and clothes [...] her role [in *Le amiche*] [...] demonstrated once again how fashion and grooming [...] were an essential part of the glamorising procedure' (Buckley, 2008, p. 276).¹⁰² The offscreen transformations of both Mangano and Rossi Drago highlight Bourdieu's insistence on the fungibility of symbolic, social, and economic capital, and how nonmonetary forms can hold just as much power as their paper equivalent' (Portes, 1998, p. 2). Yet, the embodied transformations of these women also imply the problematic nature of women embodying capital for social mobility, as it forces them into oppressive and ephemeral standards.

In the films, the two clearest examples of women increasing their economic and social mobility through embodied physical capital come from Marisa in *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* and Clelia in *Le amiche*. Marisa's use of her body as a fashion model gains her access to the upper classes, travel, and glamour, as well as the promise of 'una strada sicura' from the owner of the *sartoria*. In *Le amiche*, Clelia's trajectory from working-class girl to successful and glamorous woman is made visually credible to an audience which understands her new identity through her appearance – expensive, luxurious, fashionable. As Hipkins argues, women's 'struggle over how they dress marks the limits of their self-determination, and of their ability to control how others read them' (Hipkins, 2016, p. 60). Of her success, Clelia states 'preferisco contare sulle mie forze', highlighting the fact that embodied capital 'déperit et meurt avec son porteur' ['perishes and dies with its possessor'] (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 4). Women's cultivation of embodied capital is implicitly liberal and individualistic, and therefore manifests the most contentious aspects of the modernity dawning on postwar Italy (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 153).

Perhaps because of this tension, the social ascents of both Marisa and Clelia are shown as incurring penalties and problems. The anxiety that Marisa's promotion causes is highlighted in a number of ways: not only does it provoke Augusto to beat her for changing her appearance, but he elides embodied capital with

¹⁰² The story goes that Director Carlo Ponti 'le aveva fatto una corte serrata e le aveva convinta a operarsi al naso' (Giacobini, 2010, p. 23).

prostitution, saying ‘mi si è presentata davanti con le unghie rosse, pettinata in su [...] sembrava una di quelle’. The blurring of embodied capital with sex work recalls Peter Brook’s observation that the ‘sold body’ becomes a ‘deviant’ body (Brooks, 1984, p. 130). For Augusto, Marisa not only sells a product, but she herself becomes the product. The city space facilitates this elision, highlighted by Binetti’s remark that women in the city are ‘equated [...] to the level of prostitutes’ (Binetti, 2003, p. 206). Characters’ manipulation of embodied physical capital produces anxiety because it disrupts and transgresses established social hierarchies. Hipkins tells us that ‘the deceit that dressing-up entails is intimately connected with [...] the “unknowability” of the prostitute, and woman herself’ (Hipkins, 2016, p. 62). The woman who dresses up is a duplicitous shapeshifter, not to be trusted. Recalling Bourdieu’s description of embodied capital disrupting class hierarchies as ‘fatal attraction’ (Shilling, 2012, p. 124), it is precisely this threat which the *sarte* embody. Reducing these mobile women to prostitutes is a way of containing and condemning their social and professional ascent. Mary Wood notes that ‘the figure of the woman who uses her sexuality to move up a class echoes the position of a nation which is losing its integrity in subscribing to economic prosperity’ (Wood, 2006, p. 57), underlining the anxiety around women’s changing roles and the national embrace of modernity in post-World War Two Italy.

Conclusion

In *Le amiche*, Clelia’s work gives her the ability to embody another class, occupy new spaces, take control of her destiny, and adopt modern behaviours. Yet, these choices estrange her from her working-class identity and the possibility of a conventional female destiny. The timelessness of this paradox is reinforced by *Madame*, who tells her ‘anch’io ho passato un momento difficile, ho dovuto fare la mia scelta. E adesso mi piace quello che faccio’. The double-bind of the working woman is repeated by several characters in the film: Nene is a talented artist, but pays the price of her husband’s professional jealousy. Rosetta only dreams of being Lorenzo’s lover, but without work in her life to value and distract her, an aborted love affair is enough to drive her to suicide. I would modify Seymore Chatman’s analysis of *Le amiche* thus: ‘the implication is that for a woman without a man [or alternatively, a job] life is not worth living’ (Chatman, 1985, p. 33). The starkness of women’s choice between work, public space, and modernity and domesticity, love, and narrative fulfilment is echoed at the beginning of *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna*. The male narrator tells audiences ‘Marisa si sposa. Forse Elena e Lucia si sposeranno tra poco, non verranno più qui sotto a sedersi sulle scalinate’, underlining the impossibility for women to simultaneously occupy new urban spaces, behaviours, and ideologies, as well as traditional female roles. Let us return to Maher’s statement that the *sarte* transgress social, spatial, and gender norms, and thus avoid patriarchal control (Maher, 1987, p. 145). The films exemplify the contradictory possibilities which work presents to women; at once opening new paths, but simultaneously imposing strict borders, boundaries, and binary choices. If we

consider that these films were speaking to supposedly female audiences, in the rapidly modernising context of the 1950s, we see how these bordered choices presented to women reflect social and political anxiety over modernisation. *Sorelle Materassi* is perhaps unsurprisingly the most conservative of the films, but it is far from alone in presenting traditional ideals of femininity for the untraditional figure of the *sarta*.

Chapter 4 – *Sarte* in Oral History

In a thesis seeking to revalorise the work of women in Italy between 1945 and 1965, the *sarte*, as historian Vanessa Maher observes, occupy a ‘peculiar position, as a category of workers’ (Maher, 1987, p. 137) because of the traditional yet modern nature of their work. The present chapter extends Maher’s argument, discussing how oral histories conducted with *sarte* evidence the value and transgressive nature of their work, while often situating their work within conventionally feminine, and thus socially reassuring, discourse. Maher notes the ‘progressive expulsion of women from the regular workforce during the twentieth century [...] [rendering their work] of little or no “value”’ (Maher, 1987, p. 133). This supposedly increasing invisibility is at odds with evidence of seamstresses gaining space and fame in cultural materials in the post-World War Two period (Bossaglia, 1984, p. 45), and the rise of Made in Italy fashion brands in the 1960s (Paulicelli, 2015, p. 5). Why this exception for *sarte*? This chapter argues that the work of the *sarte* ‘was seen as a kind of extension of their exquisitely feminine nature’ (Maher, 1987, p. 138), and that the feminisation of the *sarte*’s work allowed women to occupy unprecedented spaces, while to a great extent avoiding the transgressive reputation of other female workforces such as the *mondine*.

This chapter continues the investigation begun in Chapter 3, asking how the work of post-World War Two *sarte* is remembered, this time by the women themselves. I present seven original oral history interviews with seamstresses who worked between 1945 and 1965. Like Chapter 3, the present chapter is interested in how *sarte* incorporate discussions and ideas of space into their oral histories, and argues that the occupation of new spaces is one of the main ways in which the *sarte* express the empowering nature of work. This chapter is the first where I study oral history interviews which I conducted myself. I therefore begin with a discussion of interview techniques and identity construction, engaging with oral history theory and existing studies of women’s career narratives. I then move on to discuss the sources, first presenting and analysing discussions of *sarte*’s physical working spaces, and the power dynamics expressed through them. Similarly to Chapter 3, this chapter then proceeds to examine the ideological spaces *sarte* came to occupy as a result of their professions, focusing on expressions of ambition, job satisfaction, and independence, and how these reflected and transgressed postwar social and historical norms. This section also notes the interaction between participants’ identities and on-screen media portrayals of *sarte*. Finally, informed by Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1985) and tying in with Chapter 3, the chapter explores interviewees’ reflections on social mobility.

Interviews

The oral histories in this chapter come from individual interviews with seven women born between 1924 and 1945 who lived in Emilia Romagna. Six of the seven interviewees had worked in Bologna, and the other in Rimini. Time and financial factors limited my study to the area around Bologna, but there is something to be said for the fact that, although an urban hub, Bologna is not a remarkable location for fashion and textiles. This lends a certain ‘normality’ to the subjects interviewed, rather than marking out their experiences and successes as professional seamstresses as exceptional. It is also interesting to note that Bologna belongs to what historians have called the ‘Third Italy’, notable in the post-World War Two period for its small-scale mirroring of the wider economic and social change of the so-called Industrial Triangle (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 254). Interviews took place in interviewees’ businesses or homes (and once in a café). As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the term *sarta* incorporates a wide range of work and professional status, and this is true of the subjects I interviewed. In setting out to find interviewees I imposed only two restrictions: that they were women who had worked outside of the home, and that they self-identified as *sarte*.¹⁰³ Despite limiting my inquiry to *sarte* who worked in *atelier*, there are nevertheless other variables among the women selected. For instance, five of the women had worked as *sarte* in *sartorie da donna*, three of whom had gone on to found and run their own *sartoria*, and the other two their own *scuole di taglio e cucito*. The remaining two women had worked in *sartorie da uomo*.¹⁰⁴ We should also note that, for obvious reasons, the women I interviewed had achieved varying degrees of professional success. I acknowledge that this is likely to colour how they perceive and remember their work.

Even in the larger group of *sarte da donna* we could hardly call participants homogenous; Norma Tassoni, aged ninety, had trained at the prestigious *Scuola di Taglio e Confezioni Maramotti*, and became a partisan *staffetta* during World War Two. Despite her training, Tassoni spent most of her life teaching *taglio e cucito* rather than selling her own creations. Anna Tinti, sixty-eight, another of the interviewees who worked in a *sartoria da donna* specialising in lingerie, was the wife of the owner, and designed garments without ever sewing or constructing them herself. Oriana Neri, eighty-four, owns a successful *sartoria di alta moda* in central Bologna; she directs the *sartoria*, designs, creates, and markets the garments. The same can be said of Luciana Torri, seventy-eight, a successful *sarta* with her own high-fashion bridal *sartoria* in Rimini. Which term to use to describe these women? Among them there is an evident blurring of identities between designer, owner, and creator. This begs the question: what do we mean by the term *sarta*? This is a common issue in fashion studies, and as fashion sociologist Yuniya Kawamura says, ‘when one studies to what extent the designer is involved in the actual manufacturing and designing process of a garment [...] then the job of designer becomes questionable, and then the meaning of creativity also’ (Kawamura, 2004, p. 63). The element which all the participants in my study share is their self-perception

¹⁰³ I sourced interviewees by contacting seamstresses in Elisa Tolsi Brandi’s book (2009) which lists historical *sartorie* in Emilia Romagna, through common acquaintances, and using a snowballing technique.

¹⁰⁴ This may have produced significant differences in the way in which interviewees narrated themselves as professionals, as research has shown that the predominance of male or female employees in a work environment significantly affects employees’ notions of success, performance, and identity (Ely, 1995).

as *sarte*. Although they occupied different spaces and roles within the *sartoria*, it is their perceived identity which unites them as a group. If it is true that subjects who self-categorise go on to ‘adopt the norms, beliefs and behaviours of the in-group through depersonalisation and self-stereotyping processes’ (Bothma, et al., 2015, p. 30), it is interesting to see how they construct this identity in oral histories, and how this sits within wider discourse about working women. This chapter assesses how working identity is elaborated, and how career and work narratives involve performances which move ‘between the changing biographical history of the person and the social history of his or her lifespan’ (Plummer, 2001, pp. 39-40).

Interview and Memory

Unlike my study of oral histories conducted with *mondine*, this chapter studies interviews which I conducted myself. An enriching process, it necessarily involved theoretical and ethical reflection, particularly regarding how the interview format is used by the researcher to gather data, and by interviewees to construct their own identities. I chose to conduct oral histories of *sarte* because, as in the case of the *mondine* discussed in Chapter 2, oral histories provide memories which fall within individual, collective, and cultural memory, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Recalling that ‘work ordinarily performed by women [...] (paid or unpaid) is not usually discussed in labour histories’ (Ruberto, 2008, p. 4), it was my intention not only to engage with the ‘reusable texts’ (Assman & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 132) provided by filmic representations of *sarte* in Chapter 3, but also to create a body of recorded and transcribed interviews which might be put into the public sphere and become a source of cultural memory in itself. As in the case of the *mondine*, the desire to retell history ‘from the bottom up’, is also key to my choice to conduct oral history research. Like the *mondine*, *sarte* were female and frequently from the working classes, and, as such, they represent a social group that has rarely been given voice or featured in historical narratives.

When preparing to conduct the interviews, I was influenced by Alistair Thomson and Robert Perks’ theoretical reflections on the interview process and their argument that ‘the content of oral sources [...] depends largely on what the interviewer puts into it in terms of questions, dialogue and personal relationship’ (Perks & Thomson, 1998, p. 70). Similarly, Laurie Cohen’s instructive study of women’s career narratives informed the approach I took to interviews. She recounts of her study:

This experience taught me two important things about researching careers. First, respondents often find it difficult to isolate specific events from the unfolding sequence of their career development [...]. Second, explanations for career moves and decisions often draw on experiences

that sit outside the actual work setting, thus the methods we use must enable respondents to move around their lifeworlds in this fluid way (Cohen, 2014, pp. 19-20).

Given these considerations, I adopted a holistic approach which listens to interviewees' life stories. Although my interest lies in narratives of work, this thesis is inspired by and informs the notion that life narratives are closely tied to career narratives and vice-versa. I also note that I was the person to introduce the term 'career' into these interviews, and that this itself may have had a transformative effect as 'it could be argued that career is a retrospective concept' (Cohen, 2014, p. 18). The ambiguity of the *sarte's* class position between working-class and professional may also explain why they engaged with, but did not propose the traditionally 'white-collar' notion of career. My interview technique focused on giving space and agency to interviewees to direct the flow of conversation. As Luisa Passerini asserts, 'to respect memory also means letting it organise the story according to the subject's order of priorities' (Passerini, 1987, p. 8). My own questions intended to stimulate the development of subjects, themes, or comments brought up by participants themselves.

I also saw the pertinence of Thomson and Perks' emphasis on personal relationship with the interviewee. The relationships I formed with the interviewees were for the purpose of interviewing them, although in the case of four of the seven women, we had a mutual acquaintance. I would assert that our brief acquaintance, as well as my status as foreign, young, and, perhaps most significantly, female, influenced interviewees' production. Initially, I was concerned that these factors would lead to shyness, formality, or reticence in the women interviewed, but I would now argue that participants were not hindered by our lack of intimacy. On the contrary, I observed what Celia Kitzinger calls the 'immediate short-term benefits' (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 75) and participants' explicit enjoyment of being interviewed. I too found participants to be generally pleased to talk about their lives, for reasons of both nostalgia, and recognition. This is evidenced by Giordano's enquiry as to why I was undertaking this project, and her approval when she says 'ecco. Dovrebbe andare in mezzo a questa gente, perché ormai, quelli dei miei tempi non ci sono più' (Giordano, 2016). I was also aware of Kitzinger's discussion and criticism of the 'vampiristic' interview, in relation to her own interviews of lesbians in the 1980s. Here, Kitzinger examines the idea of researchers who drain research subjects of their content and then leave (Kitzinger, 1987, p. 75). Although I followed up interviews with a letter to participants thanking them for their time, and in some cases sent them extracts of their video interviews, the thought that their testimonies might be 'taken', as Kitzinger says, with no long-term follow-up is still an uncomfortable thought.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ I hope to be able to organise a cultural event or some material in order to give participants a sense of their contribution to the project.

Work, Career, and Identity Construction

At the heart of Western society is the notion that, unlike labour, which 'is the actions necessary to fulfil our needs' (Arendt, 1998, p. 4), work serves more profound goals. Philosopher Hannah Arendt argues that 'work has become a social value which determines our worth and purpose as citizens' (Arendt, 1998, p. 4), and scholar of business ethics Al Gini argues that 'work is that which forms us, gives us a focus, gives us a vehicle for personal expression and offers us a means for personal definition' (Gini, 1998, p. 708). Social psychologists Chris Bothma, Svetlana Khapova, and Sandra Lloyd also identify work as a key factor in building identity, mentioning 'work as a central life interest, [and] work's psychological meaningfulness' (Bothma, et al., 2015, p. 25) to the individual. The narration of career involves not only personal factors, but social ones. As Cohen observes of her interviewees, 'when respondents narrated their careers, they likewise constructed their social contexts' (Cohen, 2014, p. 15). In short, work is a key factor in individual and social identity construction. This chapter analyses how the *sarte*'s personal and social identities intersect. Interestingly, much of the scholarly enquiry regarding identity construction through work has been published in journals of management and business studies, or psychology; this chapter demonstrates the interest of this approach in cultural studies.

More than in any of the other oral history studies included in this thesis, the *sarte* showed evidence of their sense of self being inseparable from their professions. I wish to consider how the retrospective and mnemonic characteristics of oral histories affect identity construction. When a subject remembers a past identity they both perform and reinforce that identity. Oral histories function as identity activation, externalising and strengthening a perceived identity. Narratives of work are important to individuals' identity construction, they are conscious and unconscious narratives of the self. When studied as oral histories, these narratives reflect identities that are at once historical and contemporary.

Physical Space in Interviews

In interviews, as in Chapter 3, women construct and recall spatial demarcations as symptomatic of social status, power, and class dynamics. Often in the interviews, *sarte* begin discussions of space in relation to their first workplaces. Interviewees commonly describe the *sartoria* as a substitute or alternative space to the schoolroom. Frequently, descriptions of their early workspaces highlight exploitation, menial labour, and sacrifice, although never in such terms. Neri comments, 'io quello che guadagnavo lo guadagnavo la sera [...] si inizia così [...] loro non ti pagavano -- neanche un libretto, neanche un'assicurazione, niente. Tu andavi a scuola' (Neri, 2016). Coppola also remembers her initial work as sometimes seemingly unrelated to the development of professional skills:

Diciamo che io ero la classica ragazza. Non mi mettevano a cucire, ero quella che mi dovevo interessare a quello che loro occorreva. Cioè, dovevo andare giù in merceria, comprare il filo uguale, i bottoni uguali, e questo e quello, accogliere clienti quando arrivavano (Coppola, 2016).

Both Neri and Coppola's descriptions of their work highlight the determination and perseverance necessary for *sarte*, yet they also recall Maher's idea of *motilità*, as both women are enterprising in their work, moving nimbly through the professional and public space. These comments are contrasted with a general lack of, or distaste for, formal schooling among interviewees. Neri notes, 'non mi piaceva andare a scuola, io non volevo andare, non mi piaceva studiare' (Neri, 2016), and Giordano underlines, 'ripeto, io non ho istruzione, ho fatto la quinta elementare' (Giordano, 2016). In her study of female breadwinners in a contemporary context, Rebecca Meisenbach observes that interviewees 'mentioned how they had been encouraged or found motivation to be independent and self-supporting from a young age' (Meisenbach, 2010, p. 15). Similar threads are equally important in my interviews, where interviewees highlight professional determination and enterprise.

We will see in Chapter 6 that women religious often describe the convent as a privileged space for women's education during World War Two. Quite the contrary becomes apparent in the *sarte*'s oral histories. Not only do many participants remember their education as of a more vocational nature, but they describe the *sartoria* as strictly hierarchical and devilishly difficult to navigate. Although they may have been called *apprendiste*, and describe the workplace as a *scuola*, in interviews there is an evident lack of discernible instruction in the *sartoria*. Apart from Tassoni, who went to a dedicated *scuola di taglio e cucito*, young employees were expected to learn the trade through watching; any verbal instruction was either forbidden or seen as a waste of time, and perhaps an attempt to usurp more senior *sarte*.¹⁰⁶ Testimonies such as, 'ho imparato sul lavoro' (Neri, 2016), 'tu vedevi, non parlavamo. Tu vedevi, se ti cadeva l'ago non potevi perdere il tempo a raccogliarlo perché perdevi tempo' (Neri, 2016), 'io guardavo solo' (Tinti, 2016), and 'dovevi sempre ubbidire' (Tassoni, 2016), support the idea of women learning through silent observation. These testimonies reinforce the idea of women workers as intruders or not fully legitimate in the working space.

[See video 'Neri Spilli excerpt']

We find multiple references to the power dynamics of looking and gazing in the workspace, as discussed in Chapter 3. Interviewees state, 'anche se mi mettevano a raccogliere gli spilli da terra, per dirti, io ero contenta a vedere sotto occhio quello che facevano loro' (Coppola, 2016), and, 'andavo in salotto alla

¹⁰⁶ Norma Tassoni frequented the famous school *Scuola di Taglio e Confezioni Maramotti*, founded by Giulia Fontanesi and later a part of the celebrated fashion house Max Mara founded by Fontanesi's son, Achille Maramotti.

mia maestra a darle gli spilli; era la mia passione perché vedevo come provava. Lei mi prendeva perché io, buona, non dicevo niente. Stavo lì con gli occhi spalancati a vedere come faceva a provare ed ero molto contenta' (Neri, 2016). Similarly, Tinti describes her formation by saying 'io guardavo solo – facevo – mi piaceva fare molti schizzi con la mano, e quindi cominciai a fare la stilista' (Tinti, 2016). Neri's identification of her silent watchful obedience as 'buona' evokes the gendered trope of female silence as desirable. Far from bitter invocations of an exploitative system, interviewees' statements are intended to highlight the opportunity accorded to *sarte* who knew how to utilise gazing to their advantage. Coppola's account of her *apprendistato* highlights this:

Mi facevano vedere il punto da ricamo, e io facevo questo punto da ricamo, come un punto d'incrocio, come un punto indietro, però io non capivo l'importanza [...]. E ho capito, dopo un po' di tempo, che avevo acquistato una certa manualità e che mi potevo servire di quella manualità quando avevo bisogno di fare determinate cose; [...] entrata un po' di amore dentro di me su questo mestiere allora ho cambiato subito e sono andata in una grande sartoria dove sono stata accolta bene. [...] Allora lì ho cominciato a capire che se riuscivo bene a imparare nell'indomani avrei potuto avere anch'io una sartoria (Coppola, 2016).

As Maher argues of the *sarte*'s emphasis on gazing, 'questo sguardo [è] una pratica legata a un certo *stile di pensiero* sociale [...]. In questo senso, l'attenzione per l'abbigliamento fa parte di un sistema di conoscenze, giudizi, valori, che crea e struttura i legami sociali' (Maher, 2007, p. 28). As in Maher's reading, in my sources interviewees' ability to gaze bestows them with new possibility and potential.

It is important to problematise the link that the *sarte* make between their effective effacement and exploitation in the workspace and the notion of opportunity. Given the increasingly liberalised employment market in which these *sarte* were working, we might reflect on what interviewees' positive attitudes towards professional struggle say about the social context. In the years between the late 1940s and the economic boom in the late 1950s, the Christian Democrat government 'fully espoused [...] the liberty of the individual and of the firm, the unfettered development of technology and consumer capitalism, the free play of market forces' (Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 153-54). We can note from collective contracts held in the CGIL archive in Bologna that in *sartorie*, the pay gap between *sarti/e* in the highest (*lavoranti di 1' categoria*) and lowest (*apprendisti/e*) categories was over 50 per cent in the period between 1945 and 1954, and the pay

gap between male and female workers existed and widened in the period between 1945 and 1960, only beginning to close from 1960 onwards.¹⁰⁷

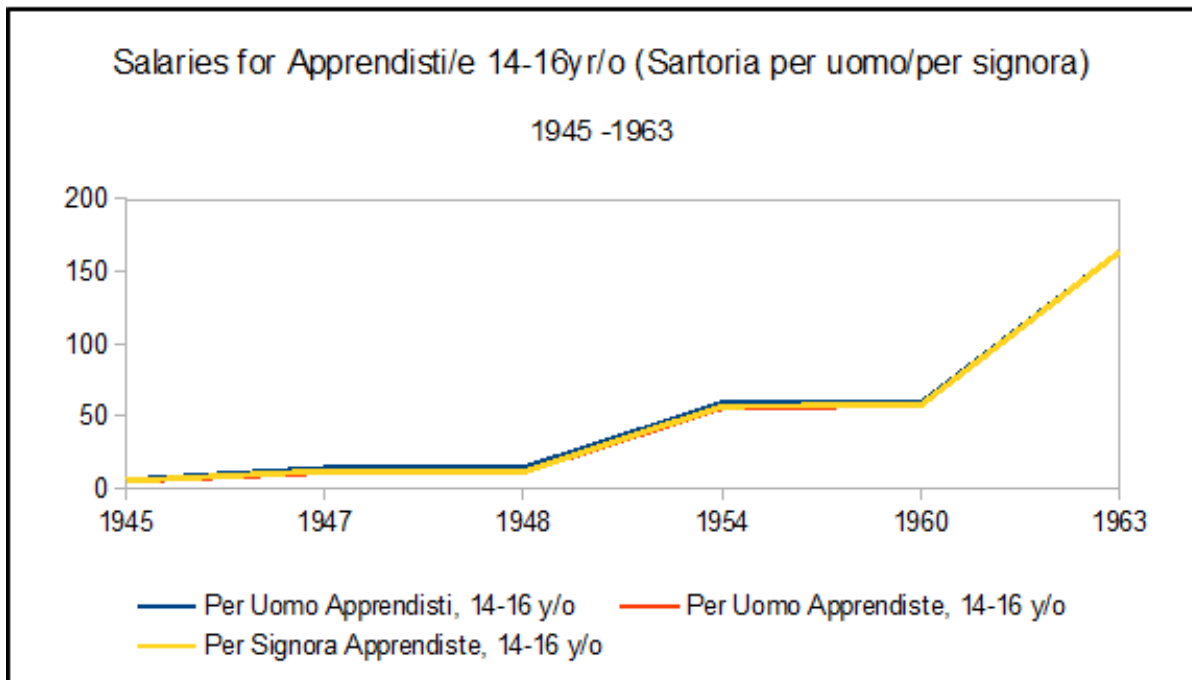


Figure 39 Salaries for Apprendisti/e 14-16 years old in sartorie per uomo/per signora between 1945 and 1963

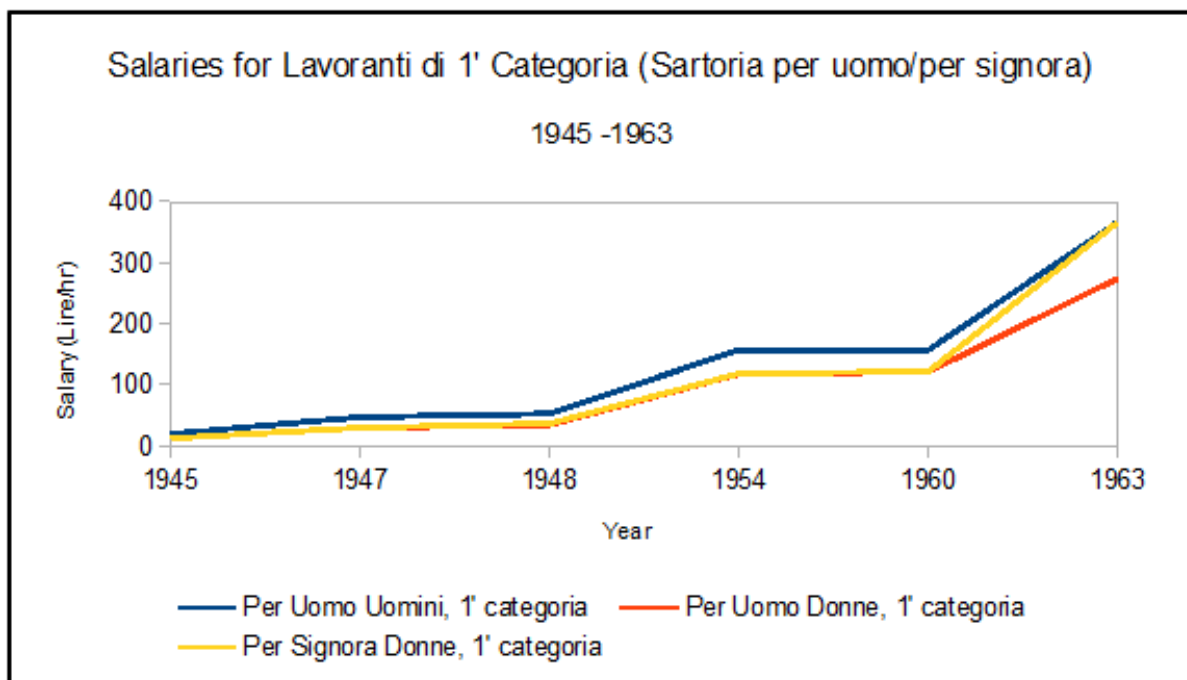


Figure 40 Salaries for Lavoranti di 1' categoria in sartorie per uomo/per signora between 1945 and 1963

¹⁰⁷ The gender pay gap was more keenly felt in higher-ranking positions, as can be understood from Figures 39 and 40 which demonstrate the salaries of male and female *lavoranti di 1' categoria* and *apprendisti/e*. Curiously, in 1963 the salary tables indicate that *lavoranti di 1' categoria* (women) working in *sartorie da donna* received the same wage as men working in *sartorie da uomo*, whereas within those same *sartorie da uomo*, female workers occupying the same rank were paid less than their male counterparts (Figure 41).

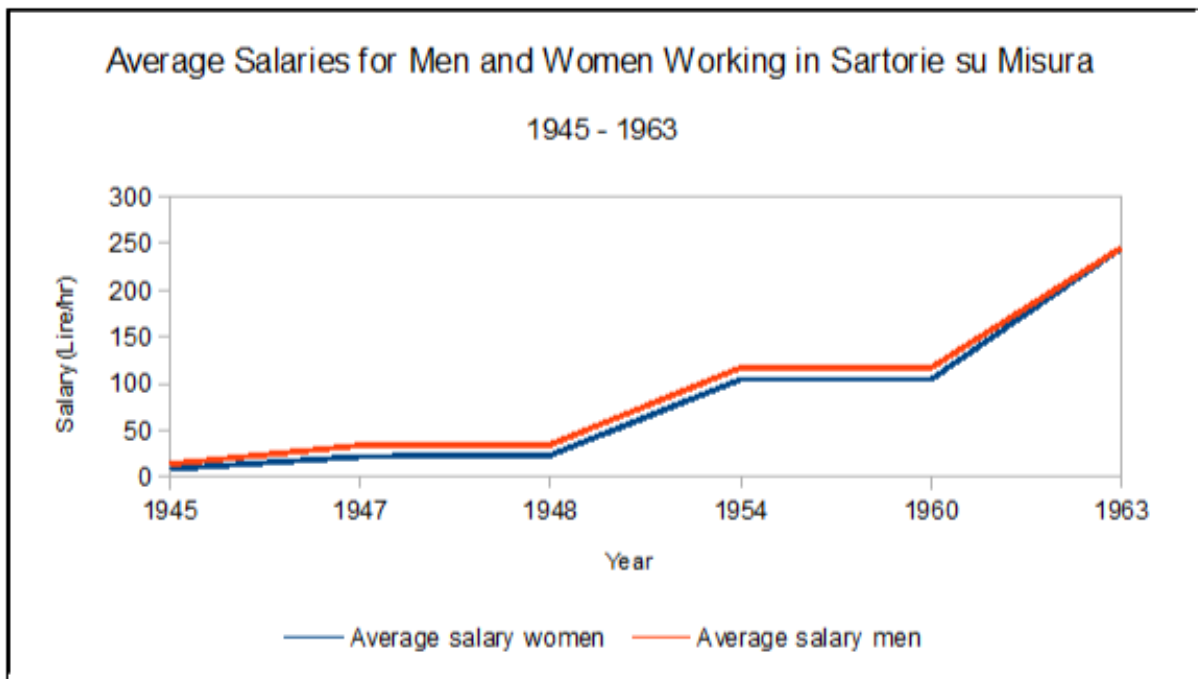


Figure 41 Average salaries for men and women working in sartorie su misura between 1945 and 1963

Interviewees' acceptance, and even enthusiasm, for a free market system where they experienced these obstacles and inequalities mirrors Italy's embrace of liberalism. This confirms Cohen's argument that historical context is an inextricable part of career narratives, and that we can read social and political history through the ideologies narrators expound concerning their work (Cohen, 2014, p. 14).

Interviewees suggest that the payoff for long hours and menial tasks was entry into the precious space of the *sartoria*. As in films, interviewees mark an ideological and hierarchical division between the spaces of the private *laboratorio*, the semi-public showroom, and the urban public space, and underline the mobility their work gave them to move between various social spaces. The *sarte*'s ability to occupy alternative spaces marks them out as independent and exceptional. Maher highlights 'la loro mobilità fisica. Le sartine che si muovevano liberamente [...] si distinguevano dalle altre donne' (Maher, 2007, p. 198). Several of the *sarte* make references to their physical mobility. Coppola remembers travelling between her school and the *sartoria* every day, saying, 'io allo stesso tempo dovevo andare anche a scuola perché non si può stare nell'ignoranza, quindi si pattuiva di fare solo mezza giornata. Io tornavo dalla scuola, facevo un po' di compiti, e poi il pomeriggio si andava in sartoria' (Coppola, 2016). Here, Coppola links the ideas of increased physical freedom with greater intellectual, and thus social, mobility. Tinti confirms the increased mobility her work gave her, saying 'non mi interessava, diciamo, la casa, la vita da casalinga [...] proprio il mio lavoro- io ho sempre amato il lavoro fuori' (Tinti, 2016). Tinti makes the case for a professional life leading women to break through spatial and gender norms, calling to mind Massey's thesis that 'the limitation of women's mobility, in terms of both identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination' (Massey, 1994, p. 179). Finally, Neri recalls how 'ci davano degli scatoloni – c'era il tram a Bologna e avevamo degli scatoloni di legno così, e andavamo in tram a portare i vestiti. [...] Eh beh, c'erano anche meno pericoli eh? Allora potevi andare per la strada, tornare a casa' (Neri, 2016).

Neri's statement evokes an ease travelling through the urban space which is underlined as exceptional in its contrast with the contemporary urban space. In her research on oral histories with women strikers in 1930s Canada, Joan Sangster remarks upon women's tendency to downplay the dangers of the past in testimony:

[Interviewees] purposely contrasted the absence of violence when they were younger to contemporary times: in their youth, they claimed, women could walk home alone at night, they were not bothered at work, and violence against women was rare. Yet, from other sources and research, I knew that violence in the streets, and in women's homes, was very much a part of daily life (Sangster, 1994, p. 9).

I would argue that interviewees' representations of potentially difficult professional realities as positive or non-existent is an attempt to erase the negative aspects of women's physical mobility, a fact which perhaps highlights its importance to our narrators' lives and careers.

Ideological Space: Struggle, Ambition, Passion

Historian of the Italian textile industry Fiorella Imprenti notes that 'la centralità del lavoro, l'attaccamento al lavoro [...] riferiti alle donne assumevano una connotazione ambigua' (Imprenti, 2007, p. 168); the importance of work to my interviewees and how they articulate this is key to this section. Coppola told me that 'si entra nella moda che da piccola sei stata in mezzo alle pezze' (Coppola, 2016), and this journey from humble social origins to professional success is reiterated by many. Without fail, interviewees specify their age at the time they began to work. The ages referenced are, historically speaking, remarkable because they indicate a contravention of laws in force at the time of the *sarte's* employment; of the women who began working independently (as opposed to in their husband's *sartoria*, in the case of Tinti and Giordano), the average age at which they started work was 13.6, with a range between 10 and 20.¹⁰⁸ The legal minimum age at which a *sarta* could be employed was fourteen.¹⁰⁹ Lucia Garagnani, who worked in a *sartoria da uomo* for her entire professional life, narrates how she lied to the owners in order to be hired:

¹⁰⁸ Respectively, their ages were 11, 20, 12, 12, 13, 12, 15.

¹⁰⁹ According to the 1945 *Verbale di accordo per la sistemazione dei lavoratori dipendenti di aziende industriali esercenti l'attività di sartoria per signora*, and the 1948 *Contratto collettivo di lavoro per le maestranze addette alle aziende esercenti la industria delle confezioni su misura per signora*, all consultable at the CGIL archive in Bologna.

Quando mi ha visto [la proprietaria], che il marito non c'era, mi ha detto: 'guarda che tu non puoi venire qua, sei troppo piccola'. Ho detto, 'ho dodici anni. Compio i tredici a febbraio, quindi praticamente sono tredici'. Allora [ha riposto la moglie] 'va bene glielo dico al mio marito poi vieni questo pomeriggio' (Garagnani, 2016).

Garagnani's statement suggests that although the women may have been aware of being young for employment, they did not have an accurate idea of the legal working age. I would suggest that the frequent mention of employment age in fact feeds into the creation of a more general narrative of struggle and ingenuity in the building of *sarte's* career and identity narratives. It intertwines with narratives which illustrate participants' passage from working-class, unskilled, and poor to personally, artistically, and economically independent.

Another way in which *sarte* express their professional journeys from humility to success is through identification with media portrayals of seamstresses. Although none of the interviewees spontaneously volunteered comments on screen representations of *sarte*, my suggestions of media portrayals were mostly met with enthusiasm and opinion. The most recognised representations were those of the *Sorelle Fontana* (Milani, 2011),¹¹⁰ *Coco Before Chanel* (Fontaine, 2009), and *Luisa Spagnoli* (Gasparini, 2016), all well-known designers in Italy.¹¹¹ Other television series mentioned include *Velvet* (Campos & Neira, 2014), and *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* (Sánchez, 1998). One *sarta* observed critically of the portrayal of Luisa Spagnoli, 'ma non si entra nella moda che tu da piccola sei stata dietro alla fabbrica di cioccolata, si entra nella moda che da piccola sei stata in mezzo alle pezze' (Coppola, 2016). Poverty and hard work were the characteristics which interviewees most identified as being representative of a 'true' *sarta*. Neri comments:

Quello delle Sorelle Fontana? Che bellezza! È un po' così eh? Non è tanto lontano dalla realtà. [...] Sì, anche loro vengono da un paese, anche loro poi vanno a Roma, incominciano- No, io non ho avuto il boom delle Sorelle Fontana, sicuro! Però, nel mio piccolo io sono soddisfatta da quel che sono riuscita a fare, da dove vengo, senza nessuno di dietro le spalle che mi abbia dato- lei tutto che vede attorno di me lo sono guadagnato col mio ago. Nessuno mi ha dato niente. Non ho trovato niente, nessuno mi ha dato niente, quindi è proprio così eh? (Neri, 2016).

Similarly, Coppola says:

¹¹⁰ A television show was released on RAI1 in 2011 called *Atelier Fontana – sorelle della moda*.

¹¹¹ The television show on the Fontana sisters was released on RAI1 in 2011 and called *Atelier Fontana – sorelle della moda*. The two-part drama *Luisa Spagnoli* was shown on RAI1 in 2016.

Quello che mi è piaciuto invece, ed è senz'altro da ammirare, la storia di Coco Chanel [...] Quella è un'altra storia. È una ragazza tipo come me, che a otto anni, nove anni, l'hanno messa già a lavorare in sartoria in mezzo alle pezze. E lei creava, metteva tutto insieme, faceva. E poi ha guadagnato, ma guadagnato un bel po' (Coppola, 2016).

Coppola's is actually a false memory; the film portrays Chanel as a cabaret singer in her youth before becoming a seamstress. Coppola's alternative memory highlights the importance of the transformation-through-fashion-work trope in *sarte's* career narratives. Lucia Garagnani says of the protagonist of *Velvet*, 'Anna è tipo me. Tant'è vero che nell'ultima puntata era lei la stilista, è diventata [grande]' (Garagnani, 2016). These testimonies underline the importance of humble beginnings, independence, and persistence in *sarte's* career narratives.

The transition from humility to success that interviewees construct in their career narratives is mirrored in descriptions of their move from rural to urban contexts. Torri describes the rural origins of her profession: 'i miei genitori abitavano in campagna, avevamo la casa in campagna [...] e non avevo materiali, io sognavo di fare vestiti -- E sai cosa usavo? Le foglie e i fiori che trovavo nei campi' (Torri, 2016). Neri notes that her rural background was seen as inappropriate for an aspiring *sarta*, and that at the beginning of her job hunt she was turned away by *sartorie*: 'suono un campanello [mi dicono] "no, vieni dalla campagna, no. Vieni dalla campagna, no. Non vieni dalla sartoria"' (Neri, 2016). Neri's story confirms the link between *sarte* and urban spaces which I note in Chapter 3, and reinforces the idea that the urban space gave women a degree of opportunity and the chance to break out of conventional gendered destinies.

Several of the *sarte* portray their entry into work as an economic and familial necessity. Giordano, who was a stylist in her husband's *sartoria da uomo*, describes the beginning of her career, saying 'subito abbiamo cominciato a lavorare e non avevamo niente nessuno dei due' (Giordano, 2016). Neri recounts the dramatic circumstances of her own financial need. The sixth of seven children, Neri saw her house destroyed and her father killed in bombing during World War Two. She recalls 'io avevo nel '45 tredici anni. E quindi a quel punto la mia mamma, in paese c'era una *sarta*, si chiamava Venusta, e lei mi mandava lì' (Neri, 2016). Both Giordano's and Neri's testimonies portray their entry into work as a result of necessity and relative hardship.

Yet, narratives of working for survival among my interviewees are insignificant in comparison to those of working for artistic fulfilment. In this way, my oral histories break with Fascist discourse of women labouring to serve the family and the nation state (Willson, 2010, pp. 85-86), and dominant postwar religious discourse and Christian Democrat rhetoric 'that woman's role as mother and wife was both

“essential” and “natural” (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 44).¹¹² In contrast, my interviews evidence the occupation of a new ideological space and identity – that of the fulfilled female professional. Neri’s approach to her work was far from what we might expect from her initial economic motivation. She describes how at the beginning of her career she changed workplace frequently, seeking out a more urban, industrialised model of *sartoria*, because she did not wish to work with domestic *sarte*. She recalls how her mother sent her to a seamstress ‘che anche lei lavorava in casa in cucina con l’odore di cibo, non mi [piaceva]. Allora io prendo l’elenco, guardo e cerco tutte le sartorie. Tutte le sartorie. E suonavo il campanello, io, andavo gratis’ (Neri, 2016). Neri’s approach, prioritising an artistic preference for high-class environments rather than the necessity of earning a living, moves away from the image of the *sarta* as manual labourer and towards the *sarta* as professional artist or artisan. Other *sarte* develop this notion, discussing the inception of their careers in terms of artistic opportunity and escape. Coppola, owner of a number of *scuole di taglio e cucito* paints her entry into the workforce as motivated by ambition and opportunity, saying ‘quello che mi posso ricordare è che era il periodo dell’adolescenza dove si cercava di fare qualcosa per il futuro. Cioè più che altro erano le famiglie che volevano indirizzare le ragazze di imparare il mestiere per il futuro’ (Coppola, 2016). Anna Tinti, who began working as a designer in her mother-in-law’s lingerie business recounts how, ‘a un certo momento a casa mi annoiavo e ho detto [a mio marito e mia suocera]: “ma, posso venire da voi?”’ (Tinti, 2016). Even Tassoni and Garagnani, who began work during the difficult periods of Fascism and World War Two, reference artistic ambitions. Tassoni frequented a renowned high-fashion school, while Lucia refused very early on in her career to complete only basic tasks, saying:

Io ero una delle due più piccole. Solo che a me il cavalletto e i sottopunti non mi piacevano. Io una mattina avevo tredici anni, sono andata a lavorare, ho detto con un lavorante ‘io domani non vengo più. Io mi sono stufata dei sottopunti e i cavalletti’ [...] ‘vorrei fare un taschino’, ma lui mi ha detto ‘ma questa notte te la sei sognata?’ [ho risposto] ‘no, no! Lo voglio fare.’ (Garagnani, 2016).

Although the testimonies suggest a degree of necessity behind the women’s choice to work, particularly for those who worked before and during World War Two, a strong sense of artistic drive and ambition also emerges. As Meisenbach found in her study of female breadwinners, participants ‘were not afraid of chance and new opportunities’ (Meisenbach, 2010, p. 13). These oral histories begin to show women as dynamic and driven, occupying ideological spaces which reflect the newfound liberalism and social flexibility of the postwar period.

¹¹² Christian Democrat Amintore Fanfani made this statement to parliament in 1946.

Passion and Independence

Not only do themes of pleasure, satisfaction and fulfilment emerge strongly from the testimonies, but they are framed in language which elevates the *sarte's* work. Indeed, we can compare descriptions of the *sarte's* work with those of the nuns discussed in Chapter 6. Competence is described as *innata*, ambition is *amore*, and fulfilment is a *sogno*. The terms in which the *sarte* frame their memory of employment are terms of realisation, affect, and fairytale. As a consequence, the seeming impact which work has on the *sarte's* identity is even greater, making it not only practical reality, but also dream and destiny. To first look at ideas of ability or competence, we can observe many instances of this being described as 'una cosa innata probabilmente [...] non è che l'impari' (Tinti, 2016). Coppola continues this discourse, saying of her aptitude, 'tu lo senti nell'anima' (Coppola, 2016). There are also observations that 'bisogna essere portati per qualche cosa. Se non sei portata non puoi inventartelo' (Giordano, 2016). These testimonies have the effect of painting the *sarte's* work as the fruit of an internal and innate ability. The overlap with vocation narratives is striking. As I argue of nuns' career narratives in Chapter 6, vocation 'refers to a divine call in the sense of being fit for something, talented in something' (Coquillet, 1994, p. 1271). This is significant because it removes a sense of personal drive or accountability in professional success. In this way, *sarte* avoid the traditionally masculine domain of ambitiousness, keeping their career narratives feminine in lexis.

There is also a strong emphasis on the idea of passion in the interviews, with the word *passione* occurring nineteen times, and being employed by five out of the seven interviewees, in statements like, 'per me è una passione, è sempre stata una passione' (Torri, 2016). Interviewees urged me to follow their suit, saying, 'pensate a quello che è la vostra passione, il vostro piacere, il lavoro che vi piace' (Coppola, 2016). Descriptions of the *sarte's* work in emotional terms often reference the pleasure, even love, which they experienced for their work, saying: 'è un lavoro che bisogna amarlo, tanto, tanto' (Neri, 2016). Coppola affirms, 'l'amore, la passione, cioè come un pittore se tu lo senti proprio nell'anima allora diventi brava, se tu non la senti non c'è niente da fare' (Coppola, 2016), intensifying a sense of individual drive born of affect. It is clear that interviewees feel a sense of individual gain which they mark out, describing their work as 'una cosa mia personale' (Tassoni, 2016). In two cases, the *sarte* describe falling in love with elements of the fashion world, once when Torri recalls how as a child watching Cinderella and seeing the costume of the fairy godmother 'mi sono innamorata *non* del principe [...] [ma] della fata smemorina' (Torri, 2016), and again in Neri's statement, 'io mi innamoro e al posto di comprare un quadro compro le stoffe' (Neri, 2016). It is interesting to note that, in both instances, the women contrast their behaviour – motivated by love – to a phantom appropriate behaviour expected of them. We could argue that these descriptions both highlight the emotive character of the *sarte's* work and simultaneously underline it as a digression from usual or suitable gendered behaviour.

I would argue that in emphasising their emotional investment in their work, the *sarte* are marking themselves out from manual labourers. Maher states that using the language of emotion and passion underlines the artistic identity infused into *sarte*'s career narratives (Maher, 2007, p. 205). Maher also notes that 'il linguaggio delle *sarte* comprende degli elementi di genere che non si trovano nella stessa forma presso l'artigiano uomo' (Maher, 2007, p. 212). The *sarte* mark out their unique professional identity as specifically feminine, carving out an identity which differentiates them both from other workers, and other genders.

There are also frequent references to interviewees' professional experiences as *sarte* as unreal. The two key terms deployed to summon such a notion are *sogno* and *favola*. Neri describes her ambition to have her own *sartoria* as 'i sogni che si fanno' (Neri, 2016). In two instances, interviewees comment, 'è stata una favola la nostra vita' (Tinti, 2016) and 'raccontata così sembra una favola, ma è la verità' (Neri, 2016). Cohen similarly observes that her older female interviewees describe their careers 'as luck or happenstance' (Cohen, 2014, p. 8). Strikingly, in her investigation of *sarte* who worked between 1980 and 1960, Maher highlights precisely the same linguistic trends and usages as those of my interviewees.¹¹³ Maher comes to the conclusion that:

Le *sarte* attribuiscono la loro competenza nel mestiere alla 'forza di volontà' e alla 'passione' di cui erano in genere dotate: la capacità di sperimentare delle *emozioni* che le persone di solito non provano, di darsi una sorta di foga creativa. La 'passione' trasformava il mestiere in un dono, in una vocazione (Maher, 2007, p. 202).

We might argue that the *sarte*'s descriptions of their work in terms of dream or fairy tale are symptomatic of shaping an identity - that of the successful working woman - into an acceptable form. Echoing Meisenbach's findings, the interviewee takes pains to '[make] sure the interviewer knows that she did not engage in any (masculine) pursuit of power' (Meisenbach, 2010, p. 8). Framing success in the unreal and fictitious terms of a dream or fairy tale in some way diminishes that success in narratives, turning it into something less tangible and more a result of chance. It is interesting to note that the more successful the *sarta* being interviewed, the more she frames her life in terms of dream or fairy tale; Tinti, who worked with national department store COIN, and Neri, who successfully opened her own high-fashion *sartoria*, are probably the most economically successful of the *sarte* with whom I spoke, and also those who most frequently employ the dream or fairy tale image.

¹¹³ It is important to point out that references to *sogni*, *passione*, *amore* etc. were spontaneous on the part of my interviewees, and were not intentionally sought or prompted by my questions.

Maher suggests, as I have, that we might read the *sarte*'s language choices in this case as attributing their work to a certain 'debolezza e irragionevolezza, dove "emozione" indica irrazionalità e caos' (Maher, 2007, p. 203). Similarly, in interviews the *sarte* did not describe their work in terms of logical or ordered process. Upon visiting Luciana Torri's *laboratorio* she proudly, and somewhat inaccurately, twice warned me, 'È un caos!' (Torri, 2016). In fact, only Garagnani who worked as a *sarta da uomo*, and Coppola, who produced both men and women's garments, underlined order and protocol as part of their work. Coppola even went so far as to say 'la cosa più importante che può dare questo lavoro sul carattere è la precisione. L'ordine. Innanzitutto l'ordine' (Coppola, 2016).¹¹⁴ This favouring of masculine attributes by women who worked in business with greater male presence is typical, as Robin Ely has elucidated in her study of male-dominated versus sex-integrated law firms. In her study, Ely found that women in male-dominated firms are more likely to associate traditionally masculine characteristics with success. If it is true that through the narration of one's career one 'articulates and performs' identity (Lapointe, 2010, p. 2), *sarte* are mostly commonly performing a specifically female identity which reflects social preferences for female docility and 'soft' skills.

I now wish to extend my discussion of *sarte*'s expressions of independence, arguing that they represents seamstresses' occupation of new ideological spaces. Although independence is a theme which emerged strongly from the interviews, the term itself was only used by the *sarte* after I suggested it as an interpretation of a comment previously made, for example:

[See video 'Coppola Independence excerpt']

Non avevo bisogno di andare vicino a un uomo, o vicino ai miei genitori [...] I soldini non mi sono mai mancati, perché prendevo sempre, veniva qualcuno e anche con un piccolo aggiusto guadagnavo qualcosa. [...]

Quindi il lavoro le ha dato l'indipendenza?

Molta indipendenza! Io sono libera di dire 'posso vivere da sola' [...] perché conto molto sul mio (Coppola, 2016).

Since the *sarte* never spontaneously offer the term 'indipendenza', I have identified several key ways in which they frame the subject: through references to self-realisation, rebellion, and mobility.

¹¹⁴ Even wage tables and collective contracts produced between 1945 and 1965 and held in the CGIL archive in Bologna reflect the idea of *sarte da uomo* following an ordered structure. These legal documents set out the amount of time each garment would take to make, and how much it would cost. No such provision is made for *sarte da donna*, presumably because of the infinite range of garments which they might produce, and the fact that the *caos* and *fantasia* which thus ensued made it impossible to fit their work into an order.

Tinti asserts that her work allowed her to escape the domestic sphere, saying ‘noi andavamo a casa a dormire’ (Tinti, 2016), and Giordano states that although she had no formal education, her profession meant that ‘mi sono saputa difendere poi’ (Giordano, 2016). These statements allow us to see how work provides individual independence which breaks with conventional gendered destinies. Other *sarte* explain their ambition and self-fulfilment through work. Coppola describes her passion for learning, saying ‘[ho sempre avuto questo fisso] di imparare tutto [...] stavo due mesi [in una sartoria], tre mesi, poi cambiavo’ (Coppola, 2016). Coppola explains that ‘sono stata così spinta, [...] ai tempi nostri, le donne cercavano di evolversi, allora volevo entrare o nella moda, o nel mondo del cinema’ (Coppola, 2016).

[See video ‘Tassoni Ribelle excerpt’]

Other interviewees had more basic ambitions for their work. In animated terms, Tassoni describes her choice to work because, ‘volevo essere una persona. Non volevo fare quello che mi dicevano. [batte un pugno sulla scrivania]. [...] Volevo decidere a modo mio; fare le mie scelte [...] non dire sempre “Signor sì”’ (Tassoni, 2016). These statements narrate the *sarte*’s work as an opportunity for empowerment and independence. Interviewees echo Maher’s observation that through their work *sarte* ‘mantenevano un senso vivo del loro Sé e della propria capacità di agire. Esprimevano tale senso del Sé in concetti che associavano le loro azioni a emozioni precise, come il desiderio [...] di indipendenza’ (Maher, 2007, p. 196). The very notion of women’s self-fulfilment not orbiting around the family, domesticity, or sexual attractiveness diverges from filmic representations, and social, political, and religious discourse of the postwar period and points instead to the *sarte* occupying novel ideological space. Acknowledging Cohen’s argument that ‘career is a retrospective concept’ (Cohen, 2014, p. 18), we might also posit that interviewees entwine elements of contemporary discourse, where work has been a core component of feminist notions of emancipation, into their narratives.

In her investigation into female workers in Turin, Luisa Passerini notes that the women often used the term ‘ribelle’ to describe themselves (Passerini, 1987, pp. 21-2). Maher states that this is not the case for *sarte*, saying, ‘le sarte torinesi sembravano vivere il loro mestiere come appropriato al genere femminile’ (Maher, 2007, p. 216), a statement which my testimonies refute. The term ‘ribelle’ is spontaneously employed by two interviewees, Tassoni (who repeatedly uses the term), saying, ‘io sono stata sempre molto ribelle [...] Contro chi ti voleva far ubbidire’ (Tassoni, 2016), and Neri, who laughs ‘sono sempre stata un po’ ribelle’ (Neri, 2016). I agree with Passerini, who suggests that interviewees self-identify as rebels because they acknowledge how they transgress gender norms (Passerini, 1987, p. 27).

Aside from these direct uses of the term, the *sarte* also provide anecdotes which suggest transgression of gender norms through their work. One such strand of narrative involves romance being replaced by work. Torri’s anecdote about falling in love with the fairy godmother in Cinderella rather than the prince, is a humorous example of her rejection of expected gender behaviours. Laughing, she states ‘del

principe mi importava un fico secco!’ (Torri, 2016). Neri similarly recalls replacing love with self-reliance and passion for work:

Ho trovato un fidanzato. Bellissimo, grande, primo amore, sa il primo amore della tua vita, bello, a diciassette anni. Quando avevo vent’anni [...] un giorno mi viene a prendere a lavorare, mi dice ‘sai che mi sposo’. Perché l'altra ragazza è rimasta incinta. [Ha continuato] ‘perché prima di te avevo una’. Io ho detto, ‘Bene. Vai’. E per me, allora ho capito una cosa; io l'ho visto dopo tanto tempo e gli ho detto ‘io ho bisogno di mandarti dei fiori perché hai cambiato la mia vita in meglio’. Dico, ‘perché io ho capito che devo contare solo su di me’ (Neri, 2016).

Neri then goes on to discuss how this romantic experience made her fiercely independent; at thirty she decided to have a child and rejected the idea of marriage saying ‘il mio marito era il lavoro’ (Neri, 2016). These statements underline *sarte*’s transgression of expected female behaviours. Recognising that ‘the image of the ‘worker-demiurge’, and that of the worker whose identity is subsumed in the product, are traditionally part of masculine stereotypes’ (Passerini, 1987, p. 51), my interviewees re-appropriate the conventionally male notion of being romantically attached to one’s work.

To tie together the ideas in this section, there is much evidence and reference to the *sarte*’s independence and the new opportunities which their work gave them. Yet, there are implicit recognitions by interviewees of the transgressive nature of this independence. Unlike the fictional representations of *sarte* in Chapter 3, these interviews are not rehearsals of new gender behaviours (Wood, 2006, p. 60) that can be driven to reassuring traditional conclusions, and as such are exceptional in their positive exhortation of female work and independence.

Class, clients and status; ‘dimmi come ti vesti e ti dico chi sei’

One of the most striking aspects of the interviews is participants’ complex attitudes to social class. Like films with *sarte*, these oral histories demonstrate the *sarte*’s knowledge and understanding of the class system. The relationship between fashion, social class, and identity construction is acknowledged by fashion scholar Diana Crane, who states that ‘clothing is an indication of how people in different eras have perceived their positions in social structures and negotiated status boundaries’ (Crane, 2001, p. 1). Or, as Garagnani puts it simply, ‘dimmi come ti vesti e ti dico chi sei’ (Garagnani, 2016). This section looks at how *sarte* narrate class and social change, their relationships with clients, and the social mobility at stake in their professions.

Explicit references to class often emerge in the interviews in response to the question, ‘come erano i clienti?’, with most replies referencing clients’ economic or social superiority. Clients are referred to as ‘gente di ceto alto’ (Torri, 2016), and ‘tutti un po’—possidenti’ (Giordano, 2016). In addition to these descriptions of clients’ wealth, interviewees demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the political and social change which impacted upon the fashion industry and the relationship between the *sartoria su misura* and social mobility. Oriana Neri details the evolution of the class system in Bologna between 1945 and 1970, saying:

Abbiamo iniziato con i nobili, venivano in sartoria solo i nobili. E poi i nobili sono decaduti, sono incominciati a venire gli industriali [...] allora le mogli degli industriali sono incominciate. Poi i politici. E quindi abbiamo passato delle generazioni di persone diversissime (Neri, 2016).

This is a potted history of the social changes occurring in what Ginsborg calls the ‘Third Italy’ between 1945 and 1965 (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 254). Neri’s relation of class to profession, and her demonstration of class privileges gradually extending to a wider demographic, mirrors Ginsborg’s affirmation that this period saw ‘some radical changes in employment patterns and class composition of Italian society’ (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 235). Other interviewees comment, ‘venire dal sarto non era per l’operaio, ecco [...] quella gente lì che era un po’ grossa doveva andare per forza dal sarto’ (Giordano, 2016). The implication in these oral histories is that increasingly the *sartoria* was a space for the *nouveaux riches* to assert their status via the acquisition of what Bourdieu has called symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1985). Bourdieu’s ideas of cultural and symbolic capital become relevant here, where ‘nonmonetary forms can be important sources of power and influence, like the size of one’s stock holdings or bank account’ (Portes, 1998, p. 2). In the changing context of postwar Italy, new money was still seeking old expressions of status through embodied cultural capital and the *sarte* were instrumental in that process. Crane argues that ‘within social classes, individuals compete for social distinction and cultural capital on the basis of their capacity to judge the suitability of cultural products according to class-based standards of taste and manners’ (Crane, 2001, p. 7). This is precisely where the *sarte* come in: as expert consultants, advising on, and facilitating access to, appropriate products for the construction of class identities.

Interviewees describe a rigid class system, where specific items and garments become signifiers of cultural capital and class. Neri notes how clients instructed her in this system:

Tu impari molto dalle clienti [...]. Io le avrò insegnato a vestirsi, ma loro mi hanno insegnato tanto. Perché ho sempre avuto una clientela molto alta, e allora, se sei attenta, capisci quello che è giusto,

quello che non è giusto. Anche proprio come indossano il vestito, quelli bravi ti dicono 'no, qui si fa così' (Neri, 2016).

Neri seems to corroborate fashion sociologist George Simmel's theory that fashion is dictated by the upper classes and imitated by the lower (Simmel, 1957). More recently, Kawamura has confirmed and built on Simmel's theory, observing, 'fashion both requires a certain degree of mobility and fluidity within a society and promotes a more egalitarian society and erases class boundaries' (Kawamura, 2004, p. 4). If there is a set of class signifiers, these can be imitated and thus social mobility is possible. The *sarte's* recollections exemplify this process, echoing Maher's assertion that they were highly skilled in working with signifiers of social status (Maher, 2007, p. 28). Neri is not the only *sarta* to observe some of the trappings indicative of cultural capital. Coppola paints a similar picture in descriptions of her working environment, saying 'avevano clienti di lusso, avevano saloni di lusso con tappeti, tappeti rossi, specchiere dorate [...] le riviste di moda che arrivavano dalla Francia' (Coppola, 2016). These signifiers of class in the fashion environment also emerge in wider discourse on *sartorie di alta moda*; Micol Fontana, legendary *sarta* of the Roman *Sartoria Sorelle Fontana*, in fact named her autobiography *Uno specchio a tre luci* (1992), choosing the iconic backlit mirror as a signifier for her career in fashion.

Recollections of a class system so rigidly based on material signifiers such as dress and decoration tie in with interviewees' comments on branding. Giordano describes how she gave clients a branded label to be sewn into garments:

Era importante avere l'etichetta?

Ah beh certo! Se era una roba Blumarine, allora, Oscar Valentino, c'erano tante firme, che adesso è un po' cambiato. Adesso, non ci sono. [...] La firma era molto importante [...] Adesso è cambiato un po' tutto, perché questi cinesi hanno copiato tutto, guarda le borse. E tu non capisci se è quello vero o quello falso. Non riesci a capire mica [...] hanno cambiato il modo di pensare, qui in Italia eh? (Giordano, 2016).¹¹⁵

The nostalgia and evocation of social change that ventures beyond fashion into global and political issues is clear in Giordano's statement, suggesting that if the class system has changed, so too have its symbols and signifiers. I would argue that part of the reason that discussion of class is so prominent in these oral

¹¹⁵ Giordano also suggests that not sewing the label into garments may also have been a fiscal maneuver, saying 'dovevamo mettere l'etichetta nel capo, allora quello si era fatto in sartoria. Io toglievo l'etichetta perché non volevo andare incontro a delle storie. Poi glielo davo, poi se lo mettevano loro se lo volevano' (Giordano, 2016).

histories is because it marks and is marked by a nostalgia for a social reality that no longer exists in the same form.

Whether or not it was they who dictated the signifiers of high class, clients emerge as protagonists in the *sarte*'s oral histories. Paulicelli underlines 'the importance of the relationship between a customer and a tailor or dressmaker, and how it can reveal hidden features of an individual's psyche' (Paulicelli, 2015, p. 2). More than any other element of their work, clients are the pivotal point around which the *sarte* narrate their careers. What is perhaps most notable is the binary way in which clients are presented; between personal and emotional relationships, and impersonal class and financial transactions.

On one hand, it is clear that many of the *sarte* have fond memories of personal relationships with clients. Torri remembers how clients 'ci portavano anche dei regali a noi ragazzine. Ci portavano, non so, una bottiglia di profumo, una scatola di cioccolatini, oppure le calze, le cose. Sai, piccoli regali no?' (Torri, 2016). Garagnani states 'sì, mi conoscevano, [dicevano] "lei c'ha le mani d'oro"' (Garagnani, 2016). Neri underlines the emotive element of the *sarta* – client exchange, saying 'ho anche delle clienti, uhh mi scrivono delle lettere, se le faccio leggere le mie lettere si mette a piangere! [...] Ho una che mi dice [...] che le ho cambiato la vita' (Neri, 2016). Maher makes a similar observation of the *sarte* she interviews in postwar Turin, saying 'il rapporto fra cliente e sarta porta connotazioni emotive e di intimità' (Maher, 2007, p. 232). These accounts mirror the autobiography written by Micol Fontana, where she structures her own life story around her favourite customers (Fontana, 1991).

Yet, despite the evident emotional exchange between *sarte* and their clients, interviewees also point to a divide between the client and the worker; one which cannot be surpassed by friendship or intimacy. Revisiting the theme of the letters she receives, Neri observes 'loro sono le protagoniste. Tu sei una che le servi, ecco. Poi ho quelli che mi scrivono le lettere, che mi mandano i fiori [...] no, sono anche troppo fortunata' (Neri, 2016). This statement puts a slightly different slant on her original comment; although she considers herself fortunate to receive affection and appreciation from her clients, she precedes this with an acknowledgement of the difference in their relative statuses. Similarly, Torri recounts of the same singers who would send the *sarte* gifts or tips:

Le cantanti che venivano quando erano qui al mare, tante, e che magari quando venivano, noi ragazze, ragazzine, no - la Milva [Maria Ilva Biolcati], la Mina [Anna Maria Mazzini] [...] - non so, ci sarebbe piaciuto chiedere una foto con l'autografo.¹¹⁶

Certo! E ha fatto così?

¹¹⁶ Milva was an Italian pop singer and famous redhead who was active during the 1960s. Mina was also famous during the 1960s as a pop singer with a three-octave vocal range.

These interviewees highlight a differential in power dynamics which Neri summarises in the following observation:

La mia storia, credo che la sa lei, perché io non l'ho mai raccontata. Loro, non si informano sulla tua anima. Loro parlano di loro. Tu devi diventare la psicologa. Perché loro, dal momento in cui si spogliano, si spogliano anche con l'anima e ti raccontano e tu devi-- la puntata dopo ti devi ricordare. Perché loro sono le protagoniste (Neri, 2016).

For all the stories of clients admiring *sarte's* skill, or sending them gifts, there is something deeply affecting about an eighty-four year old woman telling a twenty-six year old researcher that she is the first person the seamstress has met in her professional life who has been interested in hearing her story. In all the above statements, there is a conflicting dialectical relationship between *sarte* and client; a sort of one-way intimacy, which, although unequal, is ultimately portrayed as benefitting both parties, whether emotionally or economically.

Neri's description of becoming a psychologist to her clients evokes the concept of emotional work. Emotional labour, first theorised by Arlie Hochschild in her seminal work, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983), is defined as the performance of emotions often required in a professional role. Within emotional labour, sociologist Nicky James notes 'the work involved in dealing with *other peoples'* feelings' [my emphasis] (James, 1989, p. 15), as Neri's interview demonstrates. Hochschild reads the performance of emotional labour as gendered, arguing that 'lacking other resources, women make a resource out of feeling' (Hochschild, 1983, p. 163). This emotional - financial exchange is underlined by Neri who elaborates, 'la psicologia se non ce l'hai non arrivi tanto lontano eh? Perché loro arrivano – per carità ti pagano – però devi ascoltarle' (Neri, 2016), confirming the necessity for a *sarta* to perform emotional labour for professional success. The *sarte* are, in some ways, performing dual identities, one in the new superior social space which their profession allows them, the other still occupying the position of worker and social inferior.

Much of the gratification which the *sarte* glean from their jobs is remembered as being personal rather than financial. In my interview with Coppola, I observe that she experienced much success in her career, to which she replies, 'sì, successo, e soddisfazione più che altro, perché si vive di soddisfazione' (Coppola, 2016), in effect defining success as emotional. *Sarte* particularly articulate their success and satisfaction through comments about how appreciated their work was, reflecting the importance of the client to the *sarta*. When prompted to elaborate on whether the work of *sarte* had been appreciated, most

responded positively, saying, ‘facevano il filo, perché mi hanno chiamato “mani d’oro”’ (Garagnani, 2016), and ‘la gente [...] mi stimava moltissimo’ (Tassoni, 2016). Torri underlines the social importance of becoming a *sarta*, saying, ‘essere sarta voleva dire già molto perché non vestivi solo tu e la tua famiglia, ma guadagnavi anche perché vestivi gli altri. [...] era comunque riconosciuto il lavoro della sarta, voleva dire molto in una famiglia’ (Torri, 2016). Tinti says of the *sarte* who worked in her lingerie business: ‘sì, sì, erano apprezzate. Hanno fatto la loro vita bene, ecco’ (Tinti, 2016), and goes on to describe how when FIAT released its ‘seicento’ model the seamstresses working in her lingerie business telephoned her to tell her they had bought it. These narratives express financial and professional success in emotive terms of feeling appreciated by others.

Interviewees provide numerous examples of how their work affected their social status and mobility. Torri comments ‘non mi trovavo a disagio, perché io ero l’assistente del maestro. Basta. Non mi interessava chi era il cliente che provava’ (Torri, 2016). Her professional identity protected her from the implied embarrassment caused by contact with other social classes. Reflecting Bourdieu’s theory that ‘possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships’ (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248) empowers an individual, Coppola told me, ‘mi sceglievo bene la mia clientela; cercavo di entrare in quell’ambiente in cui tu non puoi arrivare’ (Coppola, 2016), describing a client base as a passport to social mobility. Both Torri and Coppola recount how their own self-perception was radically transformed through their work; Torri twice comments: ‘io allora mi sentivo Dior, capisci? Al minimo! [...] io mi sentivo Dior! Dior, e ero apprendista’ (Torri, 2016), and Coppola notes that ‘dire a quel tempo “vado a fare la scuola di stilista” era come dire chissà che cosa’ (Coppola, 2016). Although these statements might suggest a positive, and at times humorous, side to the *sarte*’s acquisition of social mobility through their work, this is also revealed as problematic. Torri goes on to explain to me that her status as a *sarta* marked her out as different:

[See video ‘Torri Umiliazioni Papà excerpt’]

Sai, nella mia generazione questa differenza te la facevano sentire [...] io avevo vent’anni quando ho aperto il mio primo negozio. Mio padre era macchinista per la ferrovia dello stato, guadagnava allora sui sessanta mila lire al mese, allora [...] io in un abito ne guadagnavo cento venti [mila lire]. Questo, cioè mio padre lavorava un mese per guadagnare quei soldi. Io lavoravo due giorni. [...] Allora era una cosa sentita un po' come – come posso dire – come un’umiliazione per il papà (Torri, 2016).

I would argue that the recollections in this section evidence how much tension was involved in the inter-class contact between *sarte* and their clientele, and their resulting social mobility. Although *sarte* evoke the advantages of social capital, intimacy between clients and *sarte* is also problematised. The work

of a *sarta* rendered social hierarchies more fluid, creating spaces in which a *sarta* could be a servant, a counsel, and a friend. Yet, the *sarte* express a certain distance from their clients, encapsulated in comments like ‘non ho mai voluto essere una di loro’ (Neri, 2016) and ‘i clienti sono come i dolori di pancia; uno va l'altro viene’ (Coppola, 2016). The *sarte*’s attitudes evidence an acknowledgement and embrace of contrasting social roles and status. This double status is narrated as leading to problems, in the sense that although *sarte* may have enjoyed a degree of social promotion, their success neither fully promoted them to a new class belonging, nor was it looked kindly upon by the classes from which they had emerged. Maher notes the double-bind of *sarte*. Not the equal of their clients, yet estranged from religious and working-class and institutions such as the *Circolo operaio*, Maher observes that ‘non soltanto le associazioni cattoliche ma anche quelle socialiste trovavano difficile da accettare la stretta associazione delle sartine al lusso e al narcisismo delle donne borghesi’ (Maher, 2007, p. 242).

Despite the evident social mobility their work gave them, none of the interviewees ever cite social climbing as a motivating factor. At most there are references to the appeal of ‘[stare in mezzo alla] gente che sono tutti in movimento’ (Giordano, 2016), the excitement of seeing famous singers and actors, the desire to work in luxurious *sartorie* rather than domestic ones, or the desire for economic stability. Self-representation points to *sarte* as ambitious artists rather than social climbers and their social mobility as a result, rather than a goal, of their work. Echoing Meisenbach’s study, participants shy away from narratives which directly state masculine pursuit of ambition or status (Meisenbach, 2010, p. 8).

Conclusion

This chapter has underlined how important career narratives are to the construction of seamstresses’ identities. I have revealed the sometimes ambiguous nature of *sarte*’s accounts of occupying new physical, ideological, and social spaces. The chapter has shown the significance of social context in subjects’ career narratives, and to what extent their work was perceived as transgressing social, political, religious, and gender norms. Unlike films, these oral histories idealise women’s spatial freedom. Despite many evocations of newfound independence, satisfaction, mobility, and agency through work, oral histories mainly avoid direct expressions of transgression or innovation. Rather, interviewees often employ strategies which gender their work as conventionally feminine. This tendency reflects Maher’s thesis, that the work of the *sarte* was seen as inherently feminine (Maher, 1987, p. 138) by women themselves as well as wider society. Rather than interpreting this discourse as devaluing their work, I conclude that oral histories with *sarte* underline the need to take a new approach to women’s career narratives, considering how they interact with, and are informed by, their historical context.

Section 3

Religiose

There were 144,171 women religious in Italy in the year 1951 (Rocca, 1992, p. 53), accounting for 20.1 per cent of the unmarried female population (Rocca, 1992, p. 53).¹¹⁷ Scholars of women religious widely agree that the activity of nuns can be qualified as work, labour, and often profession. Particularly given the Church's encouragement in its 1950 *Sponsa Christi* for religious to engage in remunerated activity, and the professionalisation of much social work – historically undertaken by nuns – in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹¹⁸ Women religious have traditionally dominated the sectors of care and education in Italy and abroad. This data begins to paint a picture of why women religious are so significant to women's labour history in Italy. As John Pollard notes, 'religion and politics in Italy have been inextricably intertwined [...] in a way that is not comparable in other European countries' (Pollard, 2008, p. 4); this is important because it foregrounds the dialectical nature of religious and socio-political attitudes to women in Italy between 1945 and 1965. The chapters in this section assess the interaction between religious and secular discourse around women, and how it permeates cultural materials like film, and women's accounts of themselves in interviews. This section on nuns asks the questions: who were the women religious living and working between 1945 and 1965, and how do they remember their lives? How are women religious portrayed and remembered as workers? What features of representations and testimonies recur, and what might this say about post-World War Two and contemporary society? What challenges, if any, do portrayals and testimonies of women religious pose to gender norms? And how did changing ideals of womanhood inside and outside of the Church affect women religious? This introduction briefly outlines the major contextual issues and changes in Italian society and the Catholic church regarding women and women religious in the post-World War Two period.

The information presented here provides a background against which the two following chapters develop. Chapter 5 examines filmic representations of women religious between 1945 and 1965, providing a close textual analysis of the films *Anna* (Lattuada, 1951), *Suor Letizia* (Camerini, 1956), and *Lettere di una novizia* (Lattuada, 1960). Chapter 6 presents a corpus of oral history interviews collected with women religious who worked between 1945 and 1965, collecting and analysing the memories they exhibit.

Research on Italian nuns working between 1945 and 1965 is important, because nuns represent a sizeable all-female workforce which has been hitherto largely ignored. Existing literature about the work of women religious is largely – although not exclusively - restricted to convent records, or histories of

¹¹⁷ In regions such as Umbria and Basilicata women religious accounted for over half of the unmarried female population in 1951 (Rocca, 1992, p. 53).

¹¹⁸ Women religious is the term used in the academic field dedicated to their study. Complete bibliographies of sources on women religious from the medieval to contemporary period can be found on the website of the History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland: < <https://historyofwomenreligious.org/women-religious-bibliography/> > [Accessed 25/07/18]

individual convents, foundresses, or saints.¹¹⁹ This research has not, according to Tom O'Donaghue and Anthony Potts, 'been accompanied by a major corpus of serious scholarship on the social history of the lives of the "religious"' (O'Donaghue & Potts, 2004, p. 469). Particularly in Italy, the drive to record or celebrate the work of women religious comes from within institutions themselves, rather than from academia. Their study is also important because it pursues oral history's goal of giving silent people a voice (Foot, 2008, p. 165). Nuns present a special case in terms of memory studies and representation, since often their beliefs cause them to shy away from both. O'Donaghue and Potts list numerous religious orders where structures are in place so that 'letters written would be as impersonal as possible, and that private feelings and thoughts should be wiped from one's mind so that one could grow again in angel-like fashion, tending towards perfection' (O'Donaghue & Potts, 2004, p. 475). A core drive of their lives, the abnegation of the self, means that nuns do not often tell their own tales, particularly during their lifetimes, and historical or popular interest and enquiry are most often posthumous. Nuns' attitudes to telling their life stories is developed in Chapter 6. Visual representations of nuns have most commonly been found in cinema and pornography, both of which have been historically problematic for the Church.¹²⁰ Particularly in Italy, in the period after World War Two the Church responded to a cinema industry it disapproved of by developing a highly influential network of *cinema parrocchiali* which exclusively showed works approved by the Vatican (Treveri Gennari, et al., 2016, p. 220).¹²¹ Nuns on screen were mostly created by secular directors and played by secular actors; representations of nuns in film are therefore more a mirror of society's attitude towards and image of women religious than the reality of women religious.

Catholicism, and its influence and ideas regarding women were in a period of change after 1945. Both secular and religious ideals for women were mutating; previously inspired by saints, religious women were now beginning to move toward self-determination. A survey of women by the *Gioventù Femminile* (a branch of *Azione Cattolica*) in 1958 demonstrated that 'solo il 26 per cento delle adolescenti della categoria sceglieva modelli di giovani sante da imitare' (La Scuola, 1988, p. 282).¹²² These responses mark a shift in Catholicism's influence on gender ideals. However, we should not overestimate the progress made by the Church in the matter of female emancipation. Echoing Anna Rossi-Doria's observation about the political invisibility of women (2000, p. 361), Adriana Valerio notes, 'anche dopo il Vaticano II la Chiesa, *società perfetta*, si presenta come un'istituzione monarchica, gerarchica, clericale e maschile, [...] a cui si aggiunge l'invisibilità istituzionale femminile' (Valerio, 2017, p. 174). Italian society was somewhat moving towards secularisation, and although at the end of World War Two 'some 95 per cent of Italians were baptised into the Catholic faith, the proportion of practising Catholics was significantly less (circa 60 per cent)' (Allum,

¹¹⁹ Important contributions to be found in this field have been made by scholars belonging to the group History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland (H-WRBI).

¹²⁰ See, for example, Treveri Gennari (2009).

¹²¹ 'Sale parrocchiali – parish cinemas – made up one third of the country's 15,000 cinemas in the 1950s' (Bayman, 2014, p. 66).

¹²² Azione Cattolica is a lay Catholic organisation in Italy, for more information on women's roles within it see Dawes (2014).

1990, p. 80). Thus we see an increasing distance between the Church and the Italian people, and with this, bifurcating notions of ideal womanhood. It is important to bear in mind these two currents in the matter of women and religion: the changing secular society outside and the traditional essentialism within the Catholic church.

What was the state of the Church following World War Two? In the aftermath of war, popular Italian opinion of the Church was complicated to say the least, not helped by the ambiguous position which the Church had occupied in relation to the Fascist regime.¹²³ Despite this ambiguity, in the immediate post-World War Two years – before much speculation about the Church's role in Fascism was aired – 'Catholicism, in various institutional forms, played a powerful, central role in the post-war reconstruction of Italy, social, economic, political and international' (Pollard, 2008, p. 109). 1945 opened up a new and less equivocal range of political and social identities for Italians, for women and for men, but the Church struggled to do likewise (La Scuola, 1988, p. 17).

In the period between 1945 and 1965 there were two major challenges to the relationship between Catholicism and women; Vatican II, and feminism. The models of womanhood propounded by the Church were hugely important to women, who were more likely than men to be socially and politically Catholic. According to a 1962 DOXA survey, 'il 61 per cento delle donne aveva assistito alla Messa, [la settimana scorsa] rispetto al solo 39 per cento degli uomini' (Willson, 2010, p. 200).

Vatican II, held between 1962 and 1965 was supposed to represent a renewed integration of the Church in the world but, in terms of its treatment of gender, it was problematic. Excluded from the first two sessions of the Council, women were eventually admitted as *uditrici* to the final two sessions, after the apt observation of Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens, author of *The Nun in the World* (1963), who objected to the absence of women, saying 'mi pare che le donne costituiscano quasi il 50 per cento dell'umanità' (Valerio, 2017, p. 179).¹²⁴ There is still a question over how much the Council itself changed the Church's attitude to women. The sources examined in this section are produced and situated in the runup to Vatican II; the films in Chapter 5 were all made and released pre-Vatican II, and the interviewees in Chapter 6 were all born and taken into orders by the end of the Council. As such, an effort will be made to detect signs of the winds of change which were blowing towards Vatican II; principally, the modernisation of religious, social, industrial, and gender norms.

Far more explicit is the direction the Church took in response to feminism, and it is useful to understand the religious discourse of ideal femininity which appears in both chapters of this section. Obviously, the Virgin Mary is the central female figure of Catholicism, and behind the Catholic idealisation

¹²³ See, for example, Montagnolo (2016).

¹²⁴ These *uditrici* were from both lay and religious communities, including experts in birth control and economists. Interestingly, Valerio observes, 'le uditrici, nelle intenzioni di molti padre conciliari, dovevano rivestire un carattere piuttosto simbolico; al contrario, esse parteciparono con determinazione e competenza ai lavori delle commissioni' (Valerio, 2017, p. 195).

of motherhood. Lesley Caldwell notes that in postwar Italy, ‘the Christian representation of femininity was almost completely identified with motherhood’ (Caldwell, 2006, p. 225). Key concerns of Italian feminism in the 1950s and 1960s, such as birth control, access to the workplace, economic and legal independence, were regarded with disapproval by the church, which, ‘temendo il sovvertimento dell’assetto dottrinale e sociale, condannava in blocco le rivendicazioni per i diritti delle donne assimilandole al laicismo, al libero pensiero e al socialismo’ (Valerio, 2017, p. 176). Although in word the Church proclaimed itself to value women, in deed it continued to overlook them. Percy Allum notes that a number of priorities in the Church ‘remained largely unchanged, right down to the time of the Second Vatican Council, and even beyond [...] [including] the family and the subordinate position of women’ (Allum, 1990, p. 82). This is clear in the models of ideal femininity which Catholicism of the post-World War Two period expounded. As well as the three models of ideal femininity, ‘spose e mamme, spose di Cristo, apostole del mondo’ (La Scuola, 1988, p. 238), Catholicism - and indeed Italian society at large - reverted to traditional gender roles after World War Two, particularly emphasising women’s importance as mothers.¹²⁵ Tied in with maternity was the valorisation of female sacrifice: ‘la donna ha il dovere di collaborare con l’uomo alla ricostruzione sociale e civile del proprio paese, attraverso le sue caratteristiche, le sue doti femminili: senso materno, senso della famiglia, spirito di donazione e di sacrificio’ (La Scuola, 1988, p. 278). It is worth bearing in mind in the following chapters that the Church often foregrounded maternity and sacrifice in discourse as a way of valorising women and femininity.

How did the Church perceive women’s work? Despite apparent traditionalism in the Church, the subject of women’s work was a subject which divided cardinals between ‘i possibili capovolgimenti di ruoli’, and the ‘ricchezze che l’universo femminile poteva ancora offrire per rinvigorire la fede cattolica’ (Valerio, 2017, p. 174). On one hand, women’s work is linked to feminism and changing gender roles. The Church repeatedly underlined the dangers of work for women. An example of this is the warning to readers of the magazine of the *Gioventù femminile*, “‘il nostro ambiente è disseminato di pericoli” si legge in una pubblicazione del 1952 destinata alle lavoratrici’ (La Scuola, 1988, p. 287). On the other hand, there were definite shifts in the perceived value of women’s work. Apostolic work and missions were common for women religious, and these represented a concerted placing of women in working roles. Women’s integration into the workplace was progressively encouraged by the Church, although it was never discussed as profession, but rather as vocation, a feature which is more fully analysed in Chapter 6. We must note that the Church’s progressive affirmation of the importance of work was firmly articulated through ‘[il] lavoro come “vocazione”’ (La Scuola, 1988, p. 285).

¹²⁵ The Church’s insistence on the essential difference between women and men in discussions around women’s emancipation led Paola Gaiotti in her leaflet *Appunti sulla questione femminile* to declare the following: ‘La dottrina della diversità, cioè della maternità radicale della donna, [...] servirà a garantire la Chiesa contro un eccesso di modernizzazione femminile [...] talora sarà l’alibi di posizioni passive e rinunciatricie’ (La Scuola, 1988, p. 281).

Cardinal Suenens argued forcefully that 'a community of nuns often enough gives the impression of being a fortress whose drawbridge is only furtively and fearfully lowered' (Suenens, 1963, p. 17). He asserted that women religious should, instead, be to the community what yeast is to dough, leavening it.¹²⁶ Recruitment figures were also directly linked to the professional opportunities provided by religious life, creating concern in the Church that women were taking religious vows in order to work (Rocca, 2013, pp. 145-46). The period under study is particularly interesting in terms of recruitment of nuns. Until World War Two convents had seen various fluctuations in recruitment, but they were challenged in the immediate postwar, leading some scholars to argue that this was due to the rise in alternative career paths for women who wished to work in the community. Whilst enclosed orders maintained high levels of demand, teaching orders, and those whose work could now largely be done without the need to become a nun, experienced a drop in recruits.¹²⁷ This decrease was still greater following Vatican II. This would suggest that women sometimes entered religious orders more for the career it offered than for spiritual reasons.

These currents in the Church and Italian society are important to acknowledge because they constitute the context within which representations and testimonies of women religious are formed. The period between 1945 and 1965 marks a time in which the Church was intensely preoccupied with being perceived as being both in-step with contemporary society and simultaneously the guardian of traditional religious doctrine. Women were a pivotal group around which this dynamic was negotiated.

¹²⁶ 'Religious in the world cannot occupy a real place without taking into account the evolution of modern society. Yeast is not placed behind the dough it is to leaven, but right in it' (Suenens, 1963, p. 1)

¹²⁷ In English enclosed orders, 'approximately one in six [postulants] was accepted' (Campbell-Jones, 1979, p. 77).



Figure 42 Silvana Mangano on the set of *Anna* (1951). Captured from the documentary *Sorriso amaro* (2009)

A 'sudden and never to be repeated domination of women in religious films' (Grignaffini, 1999, p. 299) is how Giovanna Grignaffini describes the burgeoning presence of nuns in film in the immediate post-World War Two period. Why this sudden prominence of nuns in cinema, and what do their portrayals say about post-1945 society? This chapter draws parallels between the 'three-way tug-of-war' which Wendy Pojmann describes in postwar Italy, between 'the United States and the Soviet Union [...] and the Vatican' (Pojmann, 2013, p. 6) and how this influenced portrayals of nuns in film. The social and religious tension between modernisation and retrenchment is played out in film, and more specifically in the figure of the nun. This tension mirrors the concerns of the Vatican II, held between 1962 and 1965, of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*. As Mary Wood suggests, at this time films 'allowed a wide variety of male and female roles, successful and unsuccessful to be rehearsed' (Wood, 2006, p. 60). The cinema was a place where commercial interest met moral propaganda, and was a focus for state and Church alike in postwar Italy. The chapter assesses portrayals of nuns in a context of cinema which Pope Pius XI argued must be 'moral, moralising, educator' (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 116), asking what gendered morality cinema propounded, and why. Drawing on Luce Irigaray's theorization of the absence of female lexis in the construction of gendered norms and identities (Irigaray, 1985), Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri assert the significance of female characters in films, saying, 'just as man needed an image of God to define his own gender, so the true liberation of women can only come about through constructing a symbol of feminine divinity' (Scaraffia & Zarri, 1999, pp. 2-3). How important were portrayals of nuns as alternative versions of femininity? Anna Maria Torriglia observes that in the post-World War Two period 'cinema rediscovers women' (Torrighia, 2002, p. 58), and she groups *Anna* (Lattuada, 1951) – a film about a nun – with a number

of other films of the period that supposedly do just that. Of this attention, Torriglia says ‘film directors start to share a genuine, though at times ambivalent, admiration for the female characters they portray’ (Torrighia, 2002, p. 58). Millicent Marcus observes of the use of female characters that ‘a feminized conception of corporate identity [...] allows filmmakers to apply all the dualisms implicit in traditional portrayals of women to the plight of the postwar state’ (Marcus, 2000, p. 330). This chapter studies the features and portrayals of cinematic nuns and their work, asking what these portrayals might say about dualisms they represented, and the ambivalent admiration of the societies which produced them.

The three films studied in this chapter are *Anna* (Lattuada, 1951), *Suor Letizia* (Camerini, 1956), and), and *Lettere da una novizia* (Lattuada, 1960). I will use the French title *La Novice* [*The Novice*] for the latter film throughout, as it is the version which is still available.¹²⁸ The choice of these films aims to provide a temporal spread of cultural production around women religious during the period between 1945 and 1965, focusing here on the 1950s. As noted in the introduction to this section, this period was marked by shifting social and religious ideas around womanhood, and women religious had a role to play in the negotiation of this. In secular society, there was a sense that gender roles were beginning to be questioned, and women were more visible in work (Willson, 2010, p. 207). Nevertheless, Perry Willson points out that ‘in questi anni, tuttavia, le gerarchie di genere rimasero sostanzialmente intatte’ (Willson, 2010, p. 198). The friction between the growing desire for female emancipation, and the perception of changes to gender roles, caused great social unease. This chapter argues that filmic portrayals of women religious oscillate between approval and disparagement, echoing Torriglia’s judgement of directors’ ‘ambivalent admiration’ of female characters (2002, p. 58).

The tension between modern and traditional female characters has a number of socio-historical underpinnings. Italy of the 1950s has been dubbed by historians as the Italian ‘restoration’, grappling with reconstruction and modernisation in the form of ‘American influences [...] liberty of individual and of the firm, the unfettered development of technology and consumer capitalism, and the free play of market forces’ (Ginsborg, 1990, pp. 153-54). The Christian Democrat government was, to a great extent, beholden to these ideals because of its acceptance of the Marshall Plan. Ideologically, however, ‘there was a strong cohesion of interests between the Christian Democrat government and the Catholic Church’ (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 13), and ‘traditional Catholic social theory lay uneasily alongside liberal individualism’ (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 153). The Christian Democrats ‘preached the need to safeguard Catholic values in a changing society’ (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 153). The contradictions between American and Catholic influence can be found inscribed on portrayals of women in film. ‘For the sake of its own financial stability and well-being’ (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 8), Italian cinema had to compete with popular American portrayals of

¹²⁸ *Lettere di una novizia* – or *La novice* in French - although directed by Italian Alberto Lattuada, was co-produced between Italian and French agencies Euro International Film, Production Les Films Agiman, and Production Les Films Modernes. The version still available is in French, and will be quoted in French in this chapter.

women. Yet, the Church exerted a strong force against the ‘pathological and uncontrollable eroticism’ (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 115) of these films. This chapter argues that portrayals of nuns manifest these social tensions, giving space to modern (secular) female behaviour, but ultimately reabsorbing it into traditional representations of women.

The chapter first assesses the history of representing women religious in film. A link is drawn between filmic nuns and melodramatic heroines, arguing that nuns are allowed less punitive conclusions to their narratives. Like Wood’s argument that cinema allowed new versions of gender roles to be rehearsed (Wood, 2006, p. 60), Louis Bayman’s contention (2004, p. 1) that melodrama gives space to transgressive female behaviour but still provides conservative conclusions is explored in this section. The narrative journeys women religious embark upon fit with, and go beyond, the trajectory of the post-World War Two melodramatic heroine. The chapter asks whether this narrative generosity reflects a relaxing of moral judgement of women who transgress, or the exceptionally redemptive power of the convent space. This chapter considers how women religious fitted into social and religious models of ideal and unthreatening femininity in post-World War Two Italy, and are thus portrayed positively, and as successful workers.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, religious discourse of ideal womanhood was restricted to praising women’s ‘senso materno, senso della famiglia, spirito di donazione e di sacrificio’ (La Scuola, 1988, p. 278); the chapter asks how filmic portrayals of nuns interact with these models. A key focus of this chapter is the extent to which the convent and the nun can be considered symbols of transgressive or emancipated femininity. I contend that nuns and their work were both threatening and reassuring in the tumultuous socio-political context of post-World War Two Italy. Bayman states that as a salve to national and moral uncertainty, nuns represent the Madonna, ‘a very traditional, idealized image of self-sacrificing, devoted womanhood – or rather motherhood – seen at its most perfect in the Virgin Mary’ (Bayman, 2004, p. 66). The reassuringly traditional and religious identities of nuns must be acknowledged. However, I argue that nuns and their vocations *are nonetheless* representative of agency and a break with traditional domestic and heterosexual female characters. Daniela Treveri Gennari observes how working women were included in the ‘image of that immorality from which the Roman Catholic Church wanted to free the cinema’ (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 130). Nuns are working women, yet because nuns represent Catholicism, I contend that they were acceptable characters to the Christian Democrat government and Catholic Church during the increasingly secularised 1950s. Because nuns represent traditionalism and care, I contend that they were reassuring to both lay and secular audiences in the moral and social upheaval of the Italian postwar restoration. Because nuns represent conventional femininity, I contend that they were comforting models of womanhood when both Right and Left ‘emphasised women’s maternal role, and had quite “traditional” ideas about the private sphere’ (Willson, 2010, p. 129).

Yet, nuns are nonetheless portrayed as unstable and transgressive characters. They are desperate women, and are consistently depicted as subject to unbridled carnal desires. Scaraffia and Zarri argue that ‘the heart of postwar cinema’s representational system is the female body caught in a net of motives that far more explicitly bring out the conflicts between guilt and innocence, sexuality and maternity’ (Scaraffia & Zarri, 1999, p. 299). The final part of this chapter argues that nuns’ filmic identities are in fact dominated by an interest in their bodily maternal and/or sexual urges, transforming them into the very embodiment of the Madonna-whore paradigm. Female characters, ‘when sexualised, provide a doubleness (new/old, virginal/experienced, pure/fallen) on which postwar filmmakers will base their critique of the national self’ (Marcus, 2000, p. 330). These portrayals suggest a national unease about perceived changes in gender politics, and an underlying patriarchal interpretation of women who choose religious life as unnatural. Film allows for transgressive modern behaviours to be attempted, and then reabsorbed into conservative conclusions.

The corpus

The earliest of the films, Alberto Lattuada’s 1951 *Anna*, was the second-most popular film of the period 1945-1965, taking almost 500 million Lire at the box office (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 114). *Anna* is set in Milan, and follows Anna (Silvana Mangano), a sister working as a nurse in Ospedale Niguarda Ca’ Granda.¹²⁹ Anna’s world is shaken when her ex-fiancé, Andrea (Raf Vallone), makes a reappearance in her life after a near-fatal road accident brings him to the hospital. Through a series of flashbacks, we understand that Anna used to work as a singer and dancer in a nightclub, and had a torrid romance with one of the barmen, Vittorio (Vittorio Gassman), until she decided to accept client Andrea’s proposal of marriage. Anna prepares to become Andrea’s wife by moving out to his countryside home but, unwilling to accept Anna’s new life, Vittorio comes to find her at Andrea’s home, and attempts to rape her. Andrea discovers the two and – already aware of Vittorio’s relationship with Anna – attempts to throw him out. The fight turns ugly when Vittorio pulls a gun, with which he eventually accidentally shoots himself. Distraught at having become associated with murder, Andrea orders Anna to leave, at which point she wanders onto an *autostrada*, collapses, and is taken to hospital. When she recovers, she takes religious orders and vows to stay in the hospital where she finds something she ambiguously describes as ‘never having found before’. Anna works in the hospital as a highly competent surgeon’s assistant and ward sister. The film ends with Anna refusing a recovered Andrea’s supplications to leave the hospital and marry him. She returns to her work triumphant. *Anna* is described as a melodramatic *strappalacrime*, and Lattuada himself says of the film’s reception ‘il pubblico tirava fuori i fazzoletti e piangeva’ (Cosulich, 1985, p. 51). We should remember the words of Gianfranco Casadio, however, when analysing *Anna*: ‘con *Anna* questa tendenza (quella cioè a

¹²⁹ Also known as the *Ospedale Maggiore di Milano* and thus named in Morreale (2011).

dimostrarsi superficiale e non affrontare i problemi con una personale interpretazione) viene accentuata' (Casadio, 1990, p. 37). It is true that the ambiguity of *Anna's* message and character is an issue to which this chapter returns, and which should be equally considered in relation to Lattuada's later *La Novice*.

Suor Letizia is a 1956 film by Mario Camerini, and tells the tale of a Roman nun, Letizia (Anna Magnani), whose return to Rome from missionary work is diverted when she is asked to close the bankrupt island-convent of San Filippo. Letizia is eager to shut down the convent, dealing skilfully with its debts and debtors. However, as time passes she increasingly wishes to stay at the convent and help it thrive. Letizia develops an affection both for the community, with whom she fishes and whose children she invites into the convent to be schooled, and particularly for one child, Salvatore (Piero Boccia). Salvatore is the son of Assunta (Eleonora Rossi Drago) whose first husband abandoned her. When her new fiancé, Peppino, (Antonio Cifariello) offers to marry her, his marriage proposal excludes keeping Salvatore. When Letizia meets Salvatore 'il suo istinto materno esplode prepotentemente' (Chiti & Pioppi, 1991, p. 351) and she offers to become Salvatore's guardian, even planning to take him back to Rome with her. Eventually, however, Letizia realises that Salvatore's place is with his family, and she takes him to Naples to his mother. The episode is very painful for Letizia, as the motherly affection she has developed for Salvatore throws her vocation into question. *Suor Letizia* is described as a 'heart-tugging melodrama' (Moliterno, 2008, p. 61).

La Novice (1960) is the third and final film to be considered here. The story is mainly told through flashbacks of the protagonist Rita (Pascale Petit). When we meet her, Rita is a novice at a northern-Italian convent, on the point of taking her perpetual vows. We learn that Rita had been schooled at the convent, with only a brief interruption at age eighteen when she returned to her home in sprawling country estate. This period away from the convent is the crux of the film's drama, and the content of the flashbacks to this time make up most of the film. Through these flashbacks, we learn that Rita's father died when she was twelve, leaving her young and attractive mother, Elisa (Hella Petri), to manage the estate. The estate is large and losing money, but cannot be sold until Rita reaches twenty and gains power of attorney. During her summer away from the convent, Rita meets up with her neighbour Giuliano Verdi (Jean-Paul Belmondo), a young graduate in law, and her mother's secret lover. Rita learns of their relationship, as she herself begins to develop feelings for Giuliano. She pursues an ambiguous seduction of Giuliano, and the spectator is unsure whether she is genuinely infatuated, or whether she is using Giuliano to marry and thus gain power of attorney over the estate. Giuliano and Elisa meet in the marshes near the estate, ostensibly for Giuliano to announce his engagement to Rita, but he fails to do so. Rita, who has been eavesdropping, is enraged by Giuliano's treachery and shoots him. Her mother learns of the murder and sends Rita back to the convent, where we join her at the beginning of the film. In the final scene, Rita is on trial for the murder of Giuliano, but there is no credible case against her since both her mother and the priest to whom she confessed, Don Paolo (Massimo Girotti), refuse to give evidence. The final scene sees her affirming her innocence, despite our knowledge to the contrary. Like *Anna*, *La Novice* is a film directed by Lattuada. As in *Anna*, Lattuada chooses the theme of the fallen woman seeking refuge in the convent, and in explanation

says 'mi colpiva quel velo d'ipocrisia [...] che poi è l'ipocrisia cattolica, uno dei temi su cui mi piace battere' (Cosulich, 1985, p. 77). This critical attitude to Catholicism should certainly be borne in mind when assessing both *Anna* and *La Novice*. The film was inspired by a book of the same name by Guido Piovene (1941), described as 'uno dei romanzi più significativi che siano stati scritti sotto il fascismo' (Cosulich, 1985, p. 78).

Women Religious in Film

The three chosen films represent but a snapshot of global cinematic portrayals of women religious. Many other films featuring women religious were produced during this period; Laura Pettinaroli lists forty-nine films produced worldwide featuring women religious between 1943-1996 (Pettinaroli, 2012, p. 12), and this is surely an underestimation.¹³⁰ In the period between 1945 and 1959 in Italy alone sixteen films featuring nuns were released (Pioppi, 1991). We should be careful to differentiate hagiographic films from films about nuns, and films about nuns from films which feature nuns. As Grignaffini observes, a great number of Italian films feature nuns, although in many they 'are mostly background pictures, a sort of backdrop landscape of the stereotypes of costume drama against which to project the big picture of "national life"' (Grignaffini, 1999, p. 194). This attests to nuns being symbolic of an established national identity.¹³¹ These 'background portrayals' of nuns are no less interesting than films focused on nun protagonists, and are examined in this chapter. Scaraffia and Zarri reference 'institutional reasons that go some way toward explaining this sudden and never to be repeated domination of women in religious films' (Scaraffia and Zarri, 1999, p. 299).¹³² We might recognise the technique of using women to embody national change (Caldwell, 2000, p. 136), and note that while the Church was in turmoil in these years leading to Vatican II, it is religious *women* whose image is used to portray Catholicism.

It is difficult to share Grignaffini's judgement that Italy's filmic portrayals of nuns are 'completely marginal' to the global body of films showing women religious (Scaraffia & Zarri, 1999, p. 294), although they have certainly received less scholarly attention than their American counterparts. A number of excellent works have been written about women religious in anglophone film, but academic literature on

¹³⁰ Other films which feature nuns that I have discovered and which are not on Pettinaroli's list include: two different versions of *La monaca di Monza* (Pacini, 1947) and (Gallone, 1962); *Malacarne* (Mercanti, 1946); *Vita e miracoli della Beata Madre Cabrini* (Battistoni, 1946); *Un giorno nella vita* (Blasetti, 1946); *Caterina da Siena* (Palella, 1947); *Cielo sulla palude* (Genina, 1949); *Margherita da Cortona* (Bonnard, 1950); *Giovanna d'Arco al rogo* (Rossellini, 1954), *L'angelo bianco* (Matarazzo, 1955); *Il suo più grande amore* (Leonviola, 1956); and *Io, Caterina* (Palella, 1957).

¹³¹ A notable contemporary example of this is *La grande bellezza* (Sorrentino, 2013), where nuns are shown in fleeting picturesque interludes to signal the proximity of the protagonist's apartment to the Vatican City. Sorrentino's work exemplifies film-makers' lasting fascination with nuns. See also *The Young Pope* (Sorrentino, 2016).

¹³² The obvious exception being sexfilms, in which a sustained interest in female protagonists is apparent.

nuns in Italian film is scarce and brief.¹³³ Nuns have represented figures of intrigue and entertainment in cultural materials since their existence; who can forget the much-reproduced character of the Nun of Monza, first fictionalised by Alessandro Manzoni in 1827, and before this Giovanni Boccaccio's naughty nuns?¹³⁴ Others have noted the 'explosion of interest in such topics during the immediate postwar period' (Nerenberg, 2001, p. 85): why the renewed interest?

Not all representations of nuns have historically belonged to high culture.¹³⁵ As Pettinaroli points out of portrayals of women religious, 'il faut souligner l'importance des "Sexfilms" [...], c'est-à-dire des films pornographiques, qui constituent quand même un cinquième du corpus global: tous ont été produits entre 1971 et 1986, le plus souvent en Italie' (Pettinaroli, 2012, p. 4). Both in terms of plot and aesthetic, we could tentatively consider the films studied here as precursors to sexfilms, in their interest in women religious' sexual and reproductive urges. We might also recognise traits of 'nunsplotation' films, defined by Tamao Nakahara as 'any exploitation film that takes as its main content nuns and, more often than not, naughty nuns' (Nakahara, 2004, p. 125). Although the majority of nunsplotation films – of which Italy is the biggest producer – are pornographic, many fiction films might also fall into this category.¹³⁶ The films which Nakahara studies appear during the 1970s, but I argue here that the current of films which represent 'mild to pornographic transgressive sisterly behaviour' (Nakahara, 2004, p. 125) can be seen to spring from the 1950s and the films discussed in this chapter. It is not coincidental that Lattuada, for example, later went into sex films. The sexualisation of nuns contributes to the ambiguity of their portrayals.

Nuns & Melodrama

The films *Anna* and *Suor Letizia* have been defined by critics as melodrama.¹³⁷ *La Novice* – despite the almost total lack of criticism to be found on this film – might also be put in this category, as I will argue in

¹³³ For enquiry into nuns in anglophone film, see the works of Maureen Sabine (2013), Judith Wynn (1980), Rebecca Sullivan (2005), and Mary Ann Janosik (1997), among others.

¹³⁴ Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (1827) is one of the most notable literary texts to feature the well-known tale of the nun of Monza who was imprisoned in a convent, from whence she conducted a love affair and a murder. Scaraffia and Zarri attribute the 1942 Camerini film of Manzoni's literary work *I promessi sposi* as partly responsible for the renewed interest in women religious in the post-World War Two period (Scaraffia and Zarri, 1999, p. 300). Giovanni Boccaccio included a story about carnal and canny nuns in his *Decameron, terza giornata, novella prima* (Bonghi, 1997).

¹³⁵ I use here Pierre Bourdieu's definition of high and low culture (Bourdieu, 1986).

¹³⁶ 'Due to their being "emotionally and physically inaccessible to male coercion," nuns have indeed always been considered as particularly appealing cinematic subjects, as "an underground sexual fantasy [...] whose intolerable purity invited defilement and innocence abused"', (*Talking Points*, in Babini, 2012, p. s33).

¹³⁷ *Anna*, particularly, has been named as melodrama by a number of critics including Uffreduzzi (2017), Pettinaroli (2012, p.4), Bayman (2014), and Babini (2012). *Suor Letizia* is also called melodrama by Pettinaroli (Pettinaroli, 2012) and Moliterno (Moliterno, 2008, p. 61). However, both *Suor Letizia* and *Anna* are said by some to occupy a sort of middle ground between neorealism and melodrama. In their book, Chiti and Pioppi liken *Suor Letizia* to neorealism, although a poor imitation, calling it 'neofasullismo' (Pioppi, 1991, p. 351), and Casadio calls *Anna* 'neorealismo popolare' (Casadio, 1990, p. 23).

my analysis. This section asks how nun characters fit with the archetypal melodramatic heroine, and what the use of melodrama to portray nuns might say about attitudes to women's work.

Bayman argues that post-war Italian melodrama 'truly meant something to those who made up its audience, and that to do so involved both a certain artistry and engagement with the significant experiences and conceptions of its day' (Bayman, 2004, p. ix). Melodrama was very much a genre of the 1950s, one of the reasons suggested for this is that it enabled the articulation of culpability and trauma from World War Two, displacing male guilt onto female characters.¹³⁸ Another feature of melodrama is the role which it played in negotiating gender relations. The changing roles of men and women in Italy after World War Two have led some to ask whether melodrama provided a forum to overturn gender relations, or offer 'deplorable tale[s] of moral transgression' (Bayman, 2004, p. 1) which create polarised categories of right and wrong.

Melodrama has been argued to be a 'form for secularised times' (Brooks, 1995, p. 205), precisely because it harks back to times of religious moral certainty. Melodrama instates clear models of morality, whilst giving space to divergent ones. This may explain the popularity of the form in 1950s Italy, still recovering from post-war instability, but simultaneously casting about for new and potentially enriching social models. Melodrama is a fluid genre which 'si situa in una posizione eccentrica e contraddittoria, di affermazione e insieme di rottura della classicità' (Cardone, 2012, p. 7). Melodrama's capacity to both meld and break with tradition is apparent in the three films under examination in both their moralities and their representations of women. Catholicism in melodrama 'si era rivelata vincente' (Morreale, 2011, p. 258), and Pio Baldelli affirms that 'the Church is as present as parsley' (Baldelli, 1999 in Bayman, 2004, p. 64). Melodrama's connection to Catholicism makes it the perfect genre to articulate ideas about women in 'un rigido sistema di valori dove a fronteggiarsi sono chiaramente il Bene e il Male' (Cardone, 2012, p. 11). This system was symbolic of both national and female choices in post-World War Two Italy, between traditional and alternative modern roles.

Melodramas simultaneously foreground and repress female desire, presenting both modernising (female sexuality) and traditional (Catholic) resolutions. Convents act as a symbol of this contradiction; they represent both threatening spaces of female solidarity, asexuality or even suspected homosexuality, and the reassuring containment of women and their desires. Maggie Günsberg suggests that melodramatic heroines see their desires 'forcibly subsumed into procreation, [...] within marriage, and female economic desire diverted away from the possibility of autonomy through work outside the home', and that, 'domestic bliss is presented by the melodramas as the only legitimate goal for femininity' (Günsberg, 2005, p. 19). This is clearly not the case for nuns in film. The question then is how the convent space, which replaces the domestic as the final destination for protagonists, is different. Günsberg elides the convent space with the family unit, saying that these are the 'only viable context[s]' in which to show female desire and

¹³⁸ See Garofalo (1956) and Hipkins (2007).

oppression' (Günsberg, 2005, pp. 19-20). Convent and domestic spaces are, for Günsberg, 'repressive macro-institutions like the prison' (Günsberg, 2005, p. 32). This is a broad-brush interpretation of the convent space. Despite some historical evidence for Günsberg's argument that the convent represents a 'relentless patriarchal containment of femininity' (Günsberg, 2005, p. 24), she overlooks the aspect of choice in vocation. What is more, even if we agree that the convent might contain women's sexual desires, we cannot ignore the more varied options and destinies it often gave women. Spinazzola argues that melodrama refused its female protagonists any agency, and rather featured the male character as the 'agente dinamico' (Spinazzola, 1985, p. 82). This is not true of melodramatic nuns. In *Anna*, *Suor Letizia*, and *La Novice*, women take action and make choices, often going against the wishes of male characters. In this way, nun characters represent a departure from traditional heroines and gender norms, contradicting ideals of domesticity, while staying within a lexis of Catholicism.

That melodrama was a female genre has been repeated by many scholars (Cardone, 2012, p. 9). Melodrama was linked to other popular 'female' genres, particularly the *fumetto* and *fotoromanzo*, which were associated with young women in post-World War Two Italy, and were often denounced as overly American and modern.¹³⁹ As such, melodrama fits well with the plots' negotiations of women's sexual behaviour and the all-female setting of the convent. Lucia Cardone observes that in melodrama, the 'lacrima, retorica dell'eccesso, stimolazione e frustrazione del desiderio e messa in scena delle passioni' (Cardone, 2012, p. 17), have given them a reputation as films 'pensati per le donne' (Cardone, 2012, p. 17). Such elements are present in all three of the films in question.

Like traditional melodramatic heroines, Anna, Letizia, and Rita are women who cannot or will not fulfil their 'proper' roles as 'spose e mamme, spose di Cristo, apostole del mondo' (La Scuola, 1988, p. 238). Rather, they are 'inadeguate al loro ruolo, incapaci di stare al proprio posto, agite da pulsioni che non fanno e non vogliono controllare' (Cardone, 2012, p. 18). However, unlike other melodramatic heroines, nuns are redeemed within the space of the convent. To return to that Irigarayan idea of the importance of diverse representations of women, melodramatic nuns are still the emotional women represented in wider melodrama, but their character resolutions are a far cry from the marriage/death paradigm of traditional melodramatic heroines. This may be for reasons of historical context. Marcus offers the idea that films made in the 1950s showcase Italy's 'new-found ideological complacency, together with encroaching affluence, mean[ing] that representations of the body politic, even sexualised ones, will be far less fraught with tragic potential' (Marcus, 2000, p. 339). The space given in these films to alternative destinies for women means that filmic nuns are constructive. These melodramas do not just stimulate emotion in the –

¹³⁹ Penelope Morris states that 'for both the Catholic Church and the PCI, such magazines encouraged immoral and frivolous behaviour... of poor quality and in bad taste; "newspapers for servants"' (Morris, 2006a, p. 112). One of the most memorable cultural representations of Italian female consumption of the *fotoromanzi* is that of Silvana in *Riso amaro* (1949).

supposedly female - spectator, but propose alternative behaviours, choices, and conclusions for her, in line with the experimental conservatism of 1950s Italy.

At first glance, we might suppose that the three melodramas I study here were intended for a principally female audience. Despite melodrama being deemed a female genre, Danielle Hipkins notes that in academia, it has mostly been studied for its 'überauteur', Matarazzo. This, Hipkins argues, has 'excluded more challenging readings of women posed by the power of a mode in which they may rebel or express themselves more openly' (Hipkins, 2011, p. 83). Taking a new film history approach, this chapter bucks that trend. Recent studies of Italian audiences of the 1950s suggest that 'male audiences did dominate in this period' (Hipkins, 2011, p. 84), and Hipkins argues that 'melodramatic conventions were needed to negotiate the reconstruction of gender identities' (Hipkins, 2007, p. 84). This would suggest that although tears are supposedly female, and, Marina Warner argues, 'a woman who weeps always becomes, in the very act, a mother' (Warner, 1990, p. 223), what is actually happening within the melodramatic spectator is maternal concern not for a child, but for a nation. Melodramatic nun characters, who are both sexualised and resolved into traditional Catholic models, are doubly reassuring to the male spectator as mirrors of the Madonna/whore paradigm.

Unsanctimonious Women

This section studies the pervasive representations of nuns which occur in the background of the films; in the supporting characters and contexts of the films. Remembering that filmic nuns often function as 'a sort of backdrop landscape of the stereotypes of costume drama against which to project the big picture of "national life"' (Scaraffia & Zarri, 1999, p. 194), portrayals of supporting characters and contexts may tell us more about social perceptions of nuns in post-World War Two Italy than nun protagonists. The first aspect of nuns' portrayals which merits comment is the overall positivity with which the women and their communities are depicted. Anna is shown as having been welcomed into the protective bosom of the hospital convent at her most vulnerable; having caused the assassination of Vittorio and losing Andrea's love. Those other nun characters with any development are shown to be benevolent, particularly the *madre superiora*, who is inflexible but has Anna's and the hospital's best interests at heart. This is evident when the *madre* refuses Anna's precipitous request to take her perpetual vows, and again later when she emphasises to Anna:

C'è una sola cosa che noi temiamo tanto quanto il peccato, ed è lo scandalo. La vita delle suore ospedaliere non è solo una questione di fede. Qui non deve rendere conto solo alla sua coscienza, come se fosse in un convento: mille sguardi la osservano, ogni malato la giudica. Deve essere un esempio per tutti.

This moment speaks of not only a moral strength, but of a pragmatic understanding of the place of the hospital, and of the woman religious, within society. The attitude of the mother superior echoes discourse coming from the Church about its role in society. Particularly as a result of Vatican II, the Church began to argue for itself as ‘more humble and pastoral’ (Madges, 2003, p. 88), reinforcing the need for its disciples to be moral examples. I refute Morreale’s assertion that the nuns in *Anna* are ‘antipaticissime’ (Morreale, 2011, p. 261), and ‘[il] dottore, [...] è lui la figura centrale del set-ospedale, e non le suore, viste anzi con una certa antipatia’ (Morreale, 2011, p. 259). This analysis does not tally with my view of the text, and perhaps points toward a phallogocentric reading of the film. On the contrary, supporting nuns in *Anna* resound with goodness and morality. Bayman supports such an argument, commenting of the nuns in *Anna*: ‘anonymous groups of women [...] uphold the most rigid sexual morality’ (Bayman, 2004, p. 49). The convent portrayed in *La novice* is, as in *Anna*, a refuge for the protagonist Rita. The *madre superiora* is, again, a benevolent character, shown socialising easily with the families of postulants, and distributing gifts to novices. She also shows sensitivity to the feelings of those unused to the religious life, saying ‘quand on prend la voile, il est doux de savoir qu’il y a quelqu’un en dehors de ces murs qui t’aime. Je le sais par expérience’ [‘when one takes the veil, it is nice to know that there is someone outside of the convent walls who loves you. I know this from experience’].¹⁴⁰ It is interesting that Lattuada, who despised the ‘ipocrisia’ (Cosulich, 1985, p. 77) of Catholicism, nonetheless portrays women religious as moral, kind, and worldly.

Similarly, the religious communities represented in *Suor Letizia* demonstrate both benevolence, cohesion, and pragmatism. The island convent immediately accepts Letizia, and treats her with deference. We see many scenes in which the convent community is presented as collaborating, at meal times, when looking after children, and particularly in the scene in which they labour together to build and sail their boat.

¹⁴⁰ The English translations I offer of the script of *La novice* in this chapter are my own.



Figure 43 Nuns build a boat in Suor Letizia



Figure 44 Nuns go fishing in their boat in Suor Letizia

Not only do the sisters form a cohesive team, but they collaborate with the local community in order to revive the island's floundering fishing industry. The nuns initially give their catch to the fishermen, saying 'dovete fare una cosa, portarle al mercato, venderlo, e col ricavato facciamo metà, va bene?'. They then go on to sell their fishing net to the local fishermen, and set up a scheme to share the profits of the fishing as a

regular source of income. Such portrayals represent a community of women religious who are pious, yet in tune with the local community and capable of getting their hands dirty in order to better it.

Humour also makes a subtle appearance in supporting nun characters. In *Anna*, Dona Romano plays Suor Paolina and brings her usual peasant-with-a-heart-of-gold character to the role, grumbling about Anna's infraction of rules, but humouring her nonetheless.¹⁴¹ There are other glimpses of humour, such as the ward sister who hurriedly asks a passing hospital visitor, 'scusi, hanno venduto il centro attacco svedese al Milan? [...] Quanto? [...] Hmm, poco, poco'. The football player to whom she is referring is likely the famous Swedish player Nils Liedholm, who was known and loved in Italy at the time of the film's production. Such an inclusion would doubtless have signalled to the audience an unlikely and surprising secular interest in the character of a middle-aged nun.¹⁴² In a striking coincidence, the nuns in *Suor Letizia* are shown actually playing football with the children of the *asilo*, hiking up their habits and getting involved in the action.



Figure 45 Suor Letizia plays football in *Suor Letizia*

This scene is set up for comedy, and includes slapstick moments, such as the ball striking another nun on the head when Suor Letizia takes a corner.¹⁴³ Again, the portrayal of pious women as engaging in vigorous,

¹⁴¹ Dona Romano also played in *Sorelle Materassi* as the indulgent and carnivalesque housemaid, Niobe.

¹⁴² My thanks to Alberto Del Favero for his seemingly limitless knowledge on the subject of *calcio*.

¹⁴³ Nuns playing football seems to be a lasting aesthetic interest in Italian film, with Paolo Sorrentino including a scene of young nuns playing football in the gardens of the Vatican in his cult series *The Young Pope* (2016). The scene plays out to the sound of Ave Maria, highlighting the juxtaposition of sacred and secular. Such scenes continue to provide a sort of aesthetic background to the films, rather than directly influencing plot, recalling Grignaffini's statement that nuns 'are mostly background pictures, a sort of backdrop landscape of the stereotypes of costume drama against which to project the big picture of "national life"' (Grignaffini, 1999, p. 194).

popular, masculine leisure pursuits was doubtless both surprising and gratifying to secular audiences. Cardinal Suenens maligned the comedic effect which nuns had gained in popular culture (Suenens, 1963), yet in the films it serves a positive purpose.¹⁴⁴ Rather than ridiculing the nuns, humour is used to point to humility and connection with contemporary Italian people. These portrayals served the double purpose of evoking new gender behaviours within the safe space of conservative Catholic roles.

The Convent Space

Although nuns are often portrayed positively, their choice of profession is attributed to lack of choice or punishment. Such narratives reflect the 'ambivalent admiration' (Torrighia, 2002, p. 58) of male directors for female protagonists, still avoiding giving them unmitigated agency. The convent space in the films is invariably discussed as one of isolation or refuge, unreality, and punishment. In the increasingly secular and neoliberal Italy of the 1950s 'the Church and its institutions cannot but represent a self-abnegation that is felt as the greatest possible loss, because it is the loss of the possibility of individual fulfilment' (Bayman, 2004, p. 70); the filmic convent is a spatial demonstration of this. We should nevertheless recognise that the choice of the convent space may be a source of freedom and joy for some women.

It is important first to point out the protagonists' isolation which is transmitted through their backstories, either explicitly or through omission. Anna, before she becomes a nun, is pictured as sharing a small room with her sister. Her sister detests Anna's lascivious lifestyle which involves late nights and an ever-ringing telephone. No mention is made of the sisters' parents or any wider family. Letizia of *Suor Letizia* is also portrayed as without family or connections. Rita of *La novice* is an only child, having lost her father when she was twelve, and has an almost Electra relationship with her mother, who is shown as neglectful and inappropriate by turns, and competes with Rita for younger man Giuliano. Elisa calls Rita 'ma soeur' ['my sister'], highlighting hows she shirks her maternal role. All of the protagonists are women cut loose from the traditional family unit, unplaceable in the conventional melodramatic schema of the nuclear family.

The convent is a place where women go unwillingly, or as a last resort: 'religious institutions provide succour at the same time as they confirm the absolute state of wretchedness of its recipient' (Bayman, 2004, p. 70). To first take the case of *Anna*, it is made explicit that Anna's taking refuge in the convent space (which here is in fact a public hospital) is a direct result of the collapse of her *fidanzamento*. Her sister attributes Anna's insistence on staying within the hospital to fear, saying to her fiancé, 'te l'avevo detto, ha paura di uscire di qui'. These details set up a clear link between desperation and inhabitation of the convent space, an idea which is also present in *La novice*. Rita is initially sent to the convent school after

¹⁴⁴ He commented, 'they raise at best an ironical smile when a nun is seen on her way to tend a sick person, flapping through the streets on her scooter with her habit and veil streaming behind her' (Suenens, 1963, p. 18).

the death of her father, and latterly she is returned to the convent as punishment and protection for having seduced and murdered her mother's lover. As her confessor, Don Paolo observes to her, 'si vous vous êtes réfugiée au couvent c'est pour échapper à la prison' ['you took refuge in the convent in order to escape imprisonment']. Both Anna and Rita's cases echo the notion so oft repeated in cultural materials that women became religious 'as an almost passive response to the scarcity of eligible bachelors' (McKenna, 2006a, pp. 195-96), or indeed a flight from them. Suor Letizia, too, sets up her move to the island convent of San Filippo as punishment, and the result of coercion: having recently returned from a mission in Africa, Letizia is evidently excited about the arrival in her native Rome.¹⁴⁵ Letizia exclaims enthusiastically over her view, 'anche sdraiata vedo San Pietro, e se mi alzo vedo tutta Roma!'. However, when she is asked to immediately depart for San Filippo, she is pictured outside the *madre superiora*'s office saying – eyes cast to heaven - 'Gesù chiedo perdono, ma io dico de' no, eh?'. The undesirability of convent space of San Filippo is made clear.

What is more, the convent space is presented as cut-off, unreal, and isolating to the point of being tomb-like in the films. In *Anna*, Anna's brother-in-law-to-be, asks her, 'non le viene, qualche volta, il desiderio di vedere il mondo, un po' di gente?', deeming the hospital to be isolated and lonely, despite the evident passage of many lay people pass through its doors every day. Anna's rejection of the outside world is also suggested by the scene in which she takes her first vows, where she is told 'è venuto il momento di scegliere tra due mondi: il mondo, e Dio'. The spatial organisation of the film also evokes strong and irrevocable borders between the hospital and the world. In the final scene in which Anna gazes out at the possibility of a secular future with the waiting Andrea, she is pictured through the barred gates of the hospital.

¹⁴⁵ As well as Magnani's longstanding association with Rome, her character speaks with a Roman accent. Mary Wood argues for Magnani's Roman persona in her chapter 'Woman of Rome: Anna Magnani' (Wood, 2000).



Figure 46 Anna stares through the hospital gates at the world outside in *Anna*

When the camera cuts to look at Anna from within the hospital precinct, the city walls of Milan are immediately recognisable on the other side, juxtaposing the isolated hospital and the urban metropolis. More dramatically, her confinement within the hospital is described by Anna as a death. She says, ‘mi dicesti un giorno, che dovevo sapere morire, l’ho saputo fare, Andrea’. One of Anna’s patients, a shallow and melodramatic ageing diva who is a patient of the hospital, exclaims, ‘non vedo l’ora di uscire da quest’ospedale. Sì, di tornare al mondo, a vivere’, suggesting that the hospital space is both disconnected from the rest of the world, and from life itself. The *mise-en-scène* of *Anna* similarly suggests the alienating and chromatic existence of women religious; Morreale describes the ‘bianchi nettissimi e neri obliqui’ which throw into relief the ‘estraneità di un “corpo”, quello di Silvana Mangano, sofferente e compresso’ (Morreale, 2011, p. 260). Morreale here refers to the critical trope of the fertile body of Mangano, so recurrent in criticism of *Riso amaro* (1949), represented within the hospital space as alienated and stunted. In *La novice*, Rita is similarly shown to be outside of the real world when within the convent. She goes there supposedly because this grants her immunity from the law, but she herself says ‘la vie religieuse pour moi serait la mort’ [‘religious life would be like dying for me’], once again comparing religious enclosure to death.¹⁴⁶

There is a vested interest in portraying women religious as alone and desperate in the world, and when then inside the convent space as having died, or having transformed into sub-human, sub-women, ghosts of the ‘real’ version. The films suggest that women like Anna and Rita, when free to roam the real world, create moral decay and mayhem. As Bayman suggests, in this way melodrama serves the purpose of

¹⁴⁶ In reality, laws passed in the mid-1800s gave police the right to make arrests in any place on Italian territory. Before this, the *diritto di asilo* was respected in many areas of Italy, particularly Naples (Treccani, 1929).

first showing, then resolving transgressive female behaviour (Bayman, 2004, p. 1). These portrayals suggest anxiety and incomprehension around women religious and their choices. Enclosure – which is amongst other things a rejection of men – is only allowed to be chosen in cases of desperation in films. If it is true that melodrama engaged with meaningful aspects of postwar life (Bayman, 2004, p. ix), the convent expressed social unease about female agency. In a way which would have made sense to 1950s audiences – particularly ones dominated by men – enclosure is shown to be a flight from reality and life, refuge in a sort of death. Even film scholar Morreale describes the convent as a “‘prigione’ del dovere’ (Morreale, 2011, p. 259).¹⁴⁷ These highly biased readings of the convent space reflect a testing of secular ideas, but an ultimate reinstatement of traditional gender roles. This may be considered unsurprising in the ‘renewed conservatism’ (Bayman, 2004, p. 1) of gender roles pushed by the Church and the DC in 1950s Italy.

Although the films may claim religious enclosure to be a death-like state, this is somewhat discredited by characters’ agency within them. Once in habit, the women are shown to be dynamic and driven, differentiating themselves from domestic melodramatic heroines. We should consider the possibility of the convent space used as a resolution to problematic women characters because it was every inch as reassuring as the domestic idyll, but we should also reflect critically on what audiences might have understood beyond this. As Bayman argues, melodrama may make traditional conclusions for women, but it also gives space to the ‘language of resistance in the renewed conservatism prior to Feminism’ (Bayman, 2004, p. 1). As we will see in the chapter in Chapter 6, many women were made aware of the freedoms of the religious life by those they saw around them. Films showcase some of these aspects of freedom, almost despite themselves.

Sin, Sexuality, and Maternity

Focusing in on the protagonists and the dominant narratives of the films under study, I argue here that the three films invert the reality of the nun figure. Instead of the Catholic rhetoric of the nun being elevated by her piety, the films turn nuns into fallen women. I add to this premise that the nuns’ falls are caused by their maternal and sexual urges, reducing them to the two extremes of the Madonna/whore paradigm. Maternalising and sexualising female characters reflects the rhetoric of the Church and the government at this time, where ‘the Christian representation of femininity was almost completely identified with motherhood’ (Caldwell, 2006, p. 225). Although overall it would be reductive to include these films in the category of ‘nunsplotation films’ – this so-called *filone* has strong associations with the pornographic films produced in the US and Europe in the 1970s – they do revolve around ‘improper nun behaviour’ (Nakahara, 2005, p. 169). Grignaffini argues that postwar cinema uses female bodies to connote ‘the conflicts between

¹⁴⁷ We should acknowledge that such comparisons do not come from lay society alone; in religious institutions ‘religious profession is a new “burial in the death of Christ”’ (Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, 2009, p. 22).

guilt and innocence, sexuality and maternity' (Scaraffia and Zarri, 1999, p. 300). In this section I examine the extent and consequences of this in relation to nuns.

In terms of narrative, all three protagonists are subject to an overwhelming carnal urge which leads to their moral decay. In *Anna* and *La Novice* these desires are sexual, in *Suor Letizia* they are maternal. In *Anna*, we are left in no doubt as to the protagonist's previously condemnable character. Despite her refusal to be bought by patrons of the nightclub in which Anna works – 'per contratto sono obbligata a fare dei numeri, non a sedermi al tavolo dei suoi clienti' – the film implies that she in some ways sold her sexuality. Bayman recalls that in post-World War Two Italy 'female work is considered exploitation [...] it exists close to sexual exploitation' (Bayman, 2004, p. 51). Andrea himself comments of the bar's clientele, 'non mi piace stare in mezzo a quella gente che ha diritto di guardarti soltanto perché paga'. The implication here is that even looking is a form of possession. Laura Mulvey's theory of the Male Gaze corroborates the notion that in gazing at the female body, the spectator objectifies, and to some extent gains possession of the woman (Mulvey, 1975). Anna is perceived as earning money from 'giving' herself to clients. Wood reminds us that prostitutes in postwar Italian film were 'the ultimate metaphor of capitalist consumption' (Wood, 2006, p. 56), and Hipkins argues that in melodrama 'past sexual behaviour often determines a woman's present' (Hipkins, 2016, p. 40) and her trajectory towards ruin. In films, the nun character is framed as one which can test modern secular behaviours, but who ultimately returns to chaste traditional ones.

Anna's sexuality is not only something which she is suggested to market, but also a force which she cannot manage. Her relationship with Vittorio, characterised by self-loathing and passion, is the cause of her downfall. Of Vittorio, she says, 'se lo vedo, se sento sua voce, c'è qualcosa che si sveglia in me, qualcosa che non posso nominare. Se sapessi quante volte ho cercato di sfuggire, ma è stato inutile'. This sounds very much like an avowal of what Morreal's describes as 'l'irresistibile passione erotica (puramente erotica, sottolinea il film)' (Morreale, 2011, p. 258). It is even suggested by Vittorio that Anna threw away the keys to his flat because 'non volevi essere capace di tornare, vero? Eri certa che saresti tornata'. It is Vittorio's conviction that Anna secretly wants to be with him that leads him to stay and fight Andrea, who ultimately – and accidentally – kills him. Anna's uncontrollable sexual urges are set up as the catalyst for her downfall. Like the action of throwing Vittorio's keys down the drain, Anna's entry into the convent is represented as motivated by the same desperation; to protect her from herself. When their paths cross again in the hospital, even Andrea observes, with implicit reference to Anna's libido, 'tu hai indossato quest'abito per difenderti'. Anna's story allows the audience to indulge in the libidinous possibility of a nun taking vows only to harness her unbridled lust. Such a fantasy correlates directly with Nakahara's definition of nunsplotation films as 'film[s] that exploit fantasies about and representations of nuns' (Nakahara, 2005, p. 169). This betrays a patriarchal assumption that female celibacy is motivated by unmanageable

attraction to men.¹⁴⁸ Anna's promiscuity and subsequent enclosure echoes Wood's argument that melodrama allowed new gender roles to be rehearsed, but ultimately contained, to restrain the 'pathological and uncontrollable eroticism' (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 115) which was so objectionable to the Church.

Rita of *La novice* is also a slave to sinful desires, although they are less explicitly stated. Rita's motives for her seduction, love, and ultimate assassination of Giuliano are ambiguous. Initially, her romance with Giuliano is purely strategic: to become legally emancipated and be able to take up her inheritance and the family estate. However, she later claims, 'moi je t'aime. [...] J'ai envie de te rendre heureux' ['I love you. [...] I want to make you happy']. Rita also mentions the uncontrollable and Electral desire to hurt her mother, saying 'j'avais besoin de la faire souffrir, c'était comme une vertige' [I needed to make her suffer, it was like a fever']. Rita's behaviour is shown as motivated by sexual, or psychosexual drive. Rita's relationship with the priest, Don Paolo, (Massimo Girotti), similarly suggests her corrupting sexuality. Girotti's star signification, formed by performances like Gino in *Ossessione*, connotes corrupting sexuality and sexualised physique (O'Rawe, 2010, p. 130). In his performance in *La novice*, this signification figuratively bursts from beneath his priest's cassock, and infects Rita. Their interactions are ambiguous, and at times verge on erotic. She exclaims, 'vous m'avez réveillé' ['you have awoken me'], and asks 'aimez mon âme Don Paolo, aimez moi' ['love my soul Don Paolo, love me'], as she grasps his hand and gazes at him.



Figure 47 Rita and Don Paolo exchange penetrating gazes in *La novice*

¹⁴⁸ It is worth noting that *Anna's* trajectory is mirrored in other films featuring nuns made at this time, like *I figli di nessuno* (Matarazzo, 1951), where the protagonist takes religious vows after a botched love affair.



Figure 48 'Vous m'avez réveillé' says Rita as she grasps Don Paolo's hands in *La novice*

At the conclusion of the film, the judge explains that Don Paolo has refused to give the testimony which would confirm Rita's guilt, instead he enters a new religious order 'dont la règle est particulièrement sévère' ['which has particularly punitive rules']. There is an implication that Rita awakened a sexual temptation and moral transgression in Don Paolo which he seeks to quash with mortification. Rita's sexuality is shown as absolutely corrupting, even within the sanctified walls of the convent. These behaviours again fall into the nunsplotation *filone* which allows audiences to explore behaviours forbidden to women religious.

Suor Letizia presents a different case. Magnani was not a *maggiorata fisica* like Mangano, nor was she like the chic Pascale Petit. She was also almost fifty years old when *Suor Letizia* was made, and therefore less of a fit for the 'convent-sexy' genre.¹⁴⁹ Yet, the focus on Letizia's sexuality is presented both through some focus on her body, but more forcefully through emphasis on her (foregone) maternity. Although maternity is different from sexuality, I argue here that both serve the same purpose of directing audiences into reflections about the female body and the inescapability of its carnal drives. Focus on maternity also maps onto the Madonna/whore dichotomy within whose boundaries these women are portrayed. Like the other protagonists, Letizia is brought down by a male, but unlike the others, the culprit is a male child, Salvatore. In an early scene when Salvatore first comes to Letizia in the convent, he appears in a tree while she is praying in the garden. Letizia plucks him from the tree and brings him into the convent in a scene which mimics Eve's plucking of the apple. We are left in little doubt over Letizia's maternal urges

¹⁴⁹ As it became known in Italy in the 1970s.

towards Salvatore; she immediately dotes on and protects him, giving him shelter, food, and plentiful affection.



Figure 49 Nuns dote on Salvatore in Suor Letizia



Figure 50 Nuns give Salvatore bread and milk in Suor Letizia

Initially Letizia passes off her attentions as part of a nun's duties, saying 'è nostro preciso dovere, occuparci dei bambini abbandonati'. However, Salvatore is shown to have a damaging effect on Letizia's vocation and morality. First, she uses money collected for repayment of the convent's debts to buy new shoes for Salvatore, and she defends him when he fakes a foul in a game of football. Later, and more gravely, Letizia uses her powers of rhetoric to convince Assunta (Salvatore's mother) that he would be better off staying with her, thus disordering the nuclear family and woman's sacred role as mother. In the scene just before Letizia is due to take Salvatore away with her to Rome, we see her having to be reminded by Salvatore to pray before bed, and replying, 'oh, già, la preghiera', suggesting that she has become estranged from her vocation and religious practice. It becomes clear that Letizia ardently wishes that Salvatore was her own child, and calls him 'amore', 'bambino mio', and 'piccoletto mio', suggesting some sense of possession. The narrative infers, though, that Letizia would not be saving Salvatore, but taking him away from his mother and herself away from her faith, and unacceptably disrupting gender norms. Other characters remind Letizia of her incompetence in maternal matters, asking, 'ma che ne sapete voi di com'è fatta una madre?'.

Letizia's character arc is still a tale of unbridled desire – for motherhood rather than sex – still so linked with the female body. Magnani's star persona accentuated her maternity, since she 'remains, in all her films, an actress who can carry the complex symbolism of the Italian mother in the postwar period' (Scaraffia and Zarri, 1999, p. 302). Magnani's roles as Pina in *Roma, città aperta* (Rossellini, 1945), and her future role as *Mamma Roma* (Pasolini, 1962) demonstrate the blurred borders of her cinematic performances, in this case reinforcing the emphasis on Letizia as a mother. *Suor Letizia*'s plot evokes the irrepressible and disastrous carnal urges of women, which religious life cannot contain. Focus on maternity – and portrayals of corrupting female sexuality – perform 'a convenient function in a context of renewed conservatism regarding women's roles' (Bayman, 2004, p. 67), reinstating essentialist models of femininity. The films explore female transgression, but by foregrounding protagonists' carnal and maternal desires, they hyperfeminise women, and ultimately – with the exception of Rita – return them to reassuringly Catholic forms.

To make a final point about the portrayals of women religious' transgression, it is interesting to compare it to that of the *mondine*. Whereas Mangano's character in *Riso amaro* sinned, was promiscuous, and finally committed suicide, in *Anna* she is allowed to live in the redemptive space of the convent. Rita, too, is saved from prison. In *Suor Letizia*, Letizia is ultimately allowed back to her life as a nun in Rome. In all three cases the destiny of the fallen woman has changed and improved. Whereas before fallen women had to suffer death to atone for their sins, 'displacing a sense of guilt onto female sexual behaviour' (Hipkins, 2014, p. 102), here, women are allowed to live on, to become new women through vocation, if in a highly restricted and removed context. We might read this as a reflection of modernising Italian society, more open to female sexual agency. Although attitudes were changing slowly to female transgression,

reabsorption into the hyper-Catholic morality of the convent was perhaps the only way in which cinematic heroines could achieve an alternative ending in this period.¹⁵⁰

Veiled Bodies

The bodies of the three protagonists are instrumental to the films, and pull upon the star signification (Dyer, 1998, p. 1) of the actresses who play them. Historian Maureen Sabine counsels that a nun's 'religious veil and full habit that show her only in part are barriers to imagining her as a whole person' (Sabine, 2013, p. 1). Similarly, Sarah Ahmed suggests that when we perceive an individual as unknowable, they 'must be penetrated or uncovered. We must "get to them" to "get away from them"' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 97). These observations are interesting in considering the fascination of unveiling nuns in film. Film reinforces the notion that only when we are allowed beneath the habit do these women become whole (again). Viewers are led to dwell on what the habit is supposedly hiding – both practically and figuratively. The use of star figures to play nuns intensifies audiences' attention on their bodies. Bayman observes that 'diva means divinity, divine being' (Bayman, 2004, p. 71); in these films divas are the site at which religious and secular ideas of divinity converge in the bodies of women.

Each film includes one critical moment in which the 'real' female body of the nun is revealed to signal a dramatic turn. The supposed revelation of the 'normality' of nuns' bodies is in fact a guise for their sexualisation. In *Anna* and *Suor Letizia*, their normality is exposed when the women's veil is removed. In *Anna* the nun reveals her hair – still fashionably coiffed – to Andrea, because he does not recognise her in the habit. She even invites him – and the audience – to truly see her, saying, 'guardami, guardami'.

¹⁵⁰ All three films were produced in an Italy still using the Fascist penal code, in which Article 559 stipulated that adultery was a purely female phenomenon and punishable by imprisonment. This law was only amended in 1968.



Figure 51 Anna removes her veil and urges Andrea to look at her in *Anna*

The suggestion is that the true Anna is the one beneath the habit, still fashionable, still sexually desirable and available for intra- and extra-diegetic consumption. Elisabetta Babini argues that this moment (amongst others) in *Anna* reveals ‘the character’s distinctive sensuality even as a nun, her bodily forms being hidden by the religious habit’ (Babini, 2012, p. 30). We must acknowledge both Mangano’s star persona, and the intertextual relevance of other of her performances here.¹⁵¹ As argued by Richard Dyer, stars had a signification which went beyond the specific character they were portraying at any one time (1998, p. 1). I would argue that director, audience, and critics were thinking about Mangano’s – rather than *Anna*’s – body. However, other scholars disagree on the use of Mangano’s body as Anna; Cosulich notes that Lattuada refused to use the *maggiorata fisica* type in his films, and that ‘la Mangano di *Anna* non era più la Mangano di *Riso amaro*, era già in corso quel processo di prosciugamento che l’avrebbe trasformata’ (Cosulich, 1985, p. 90). Indeed, we might consider the penurious diet that Mangano adopted as her career progressed, and that this signification of physical mortification may also have played a part in her accomplishment in the role of a nun (Buckley, 2008, p. 276). Nonetheless, Scaraffia and Zarri claim that ‘under its nun’s white habit, austere and yet loaded with sensuality, Mangano’s body remained ambiguously resplendent’ (Scaraffia and Zarri, 1999, p. 300), and Adriano Aprà notes her performance which had an ‘effetto di diverso ma non minore erotismo rispetto alle calze da mondina’ (Aprà, 2009, p. 171). From criticism made at the time of *Anna*’s release we can see how Mangano’s body was a central focus of her performance. One French critic first discusses Silvana’s ‘cuisses et tétons dans *Riz amer*’ [thighs

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Mangano’s previous films such as *Riso amaro* (1949).

and nipples in *Riso amaro*'], then decries the fact that 'des scénaristes, sans aucun sens du ridicule, la déguisent en religieuse' ['the writers, without any sense of the absurd, dress her up as a nun']. Another complains 'ne pensez pas que vous allez voir Silvana sans voiles. Vous allez voir des voiles sans Silvana !' ['don't be fooled into thinking that you will see Silvana unveiled. You will only see the veil and no Silvana!'] (Helaauwick, 1952).¹⁵² Mangano's persona and past performances, but most of all her body, were on the minds of audiences and critics alike. The use of stars tends the films towards nunsplotation, and heterosexual fantasy as driving cinematic portrayals of women religious. By using stars with a strong signification for their sexualised bodies, the films suggest that nuns' 'true' and sexual bodies are never far beneath the surface of the habit.

In *Suor Letizia*, Letizia's body is similarly unveiled. A climax is reached in the intimacy between Letizia and Salvatore when they walk to a clifftop together and she kisses and embraces him. In doing so, her veil becomes unpinned, and Salvatore exclaims, 'uuh, pure le monache c'hanno i capelli? [...] Allora sei come le altre donne', to which Letizia replies, 'sì, sono come le altre donne'.



Figure 52 Letizia's veil becomes unpinned in *Suor Letizia*

Her face betrays fear and shock at her own sentiments, which we can read as an avowal of maternal desire. Again, Magnani's star signification is important to our understanding of her body in the film. As Wood points out, Magnani's body was synonymous with motherhood and everyday Italian femininity in a way which prefigures and supports the idea that she is 'come le altre donne' in her maternal desires (Wood,

¹⁵² This critic continues by arguing that Silvana's role is as if 'vous alliez à Montelimar chez un marchand de nougat avec l'intention de laper du nougat, et s'il vous vendait son produit enfermé dans une chape de plomb, tel de l'uranium' ['you went to Montelimar to a nougat seller with the intent to eat some nougat, and they sold you the nougat locked in an iron safe as if it were uranium'] (Helaauwick, 1952).

2000). Günsberg reminds us that the showing of hair in Italian melodramas is also a strategy to remind us of the femininity of protagonists, and the unbridled sexuality which they represent. She observes that 'hair has historically symbolized female sexuality and desire', but also, that 'hair is usually only around shoulder length in this postwar genre' (Günsberg, 2005, p. 32). Both these statements ring true in the scenes in *Anna* and *Suor Letizia*, where both characters are suddenly sexualised and gendered by unveiling their hair, but their shoulder-length locks mix meanings of modernity with curtailed sexuality.

There is another moment in which the libidinous gaze of the spectator is indulged by gazing upon Mangano's body. Using the device of flashbacks, Lattuada is able to unveil Anna's body as an object of desire. The flashback fades directly from a shot of Anna praying to reveal the murky setting of the nightclub, and Anna dancing. Morreale references the sexual suspense that the audience had been held in until this moment as follows: 'dopo aver tirato la corda per quasi mezz'ora, ecco l'apparizione [di Mangano]' (Morreale, 2011, p. 258). Morreale's comment only makes sense if we accept that audiences were motivated to watch *Anna* in order to see her unveiling. Whether in *Anna* gazing up through the eyes of Andrea, or in *Suor Letizia* peering down through the eyes of Salvatore, Mulvey's notion of the male gaze (1975) is clearly identifiable; spectators discover the characters' bodies as if through the eyes of men.¹⁵³ Whether this unveiling is meant to satisfy a sexual gaze, or one of another type is thrown into doubt by Bayman. He insightfully notes:

A normally sexualised performer such as Mangano is in *Anna* presented largely in long-shot when she appears onstage singing 'El Negro Zumbon', not fragmenting her body parts with the fetishism that Mulvey ascribes to Hollywood's presentation of women, but incorporating her movement into a stage ensemble (Bayman, 2004, p. 59).

He further observes that 'in the mixed-sex audience the female members are revealed as watching most intently' (Bayman, 2004, p. 59). We might question the supposed gender and motive of the gaze in this case: is this gaze in fact supposed to mirror a female spectator, who is not sexualising but aspiring to the character of Mangano? To return to Irigaray's notion of the importance of visible female models, perhaps this gaze might mirror female spectators gazing at an alternative model of femininity.

Similarly, in *La Novice* Rita has both explicit and implicit emphasis put upon her body. She participates in a cabaret-style show during her holiday from the convent, which Giuliano watches. Her body is exposed in a skimpy leotard and lingered upon by the camera.

¹⁵³ See Chapter 1 on the *mondine* in film. Babini similarly comments of Mangano: 'Not by chance, her provocative dancing in *Anna*, but also in *Bitter Rice* (1949), *The Lure of the Sila* (1949) and *Mambo* (1954) are cardinal references in any account of women's representation in Italian cinema even now' (Babini, 2012, p. s30).



Figure 53 Rita performs a dance in La novice



Figure 54 A close-up of Rita's chest while dancing in La novice



Figure 55 A close-up of Rita's hips while dancing in *La novice*

This scene marks the moment in which Rita succeeds in seducing Giuliano and begins her sin in earnest. Moreover, like Magnani and Mangano (although to a lesser degree), Pascale Petit brings her own star signification linked to her body. In reviews written around the time of *La Novice*, Petit's physicality is particularly prominent. She is referred to as 'una diva tascabile' (Istituto Luce, 1960), and 'diminutive' (Hughes, 2011, p. 213). In a spot for *Settimana Incom*, Petit is said to be 'stanca di essere considerata troppo sexy' (Istituto Luce, 1960). These are among the very few descriptions of Petit, in English, French, and Italian. It is important to note that in the scarce descriptions of the actress, her body is the most frequent point of reference.¹⁵⁴

The sexualising power of these moments of unveiling is evident. In all three cases the body of the nun is revealed to both extra and intra-diegetic audiences. It would appear that there is a drive in cinema to uncover women religious in film, as a device to bring them down to earth, among sinners. These scenes which focus on and reveal the bodies of nuns represent their becoming 'come le altre donne', implicitly suggesting that religious life is an unnatural state for women. These films fall into the *filone* of the nunsploitation film which implies and reveals forbidden behaviours in nuns, and feeds a libidinous audience urge to participate in this unveiling. This strategy relies heavily upon stars who already bear the burden of the signification of their bodies. Foregrounding nuns' bodies reinstates them with the Madonna/whore paradigm, tests modern representations of women's sexualities, and reassures and gratifies the male spectator. The revealing of nuns' bodies plays into the idea that Italian film had to compete with American

¹⁵⁴ Another trait of Petit's to be remarked upon is her acid tongue: 'i critici a Parigi le hanno assegnata il premio limone, per le sue risposte all'acido solforico' (Istituto Luce, 1960).

portrayals of women for commercial reasons (Treveri Gennari, 2009, p. 8). However, nuns' bodies are ultimately reabsorbed into traditional conclusions (with the exception of Rita). This supports Marcus' observation that 'in the domestic cocoon of Restoration Italy, the peril is never too great and the eroticized body politic poses no threat that marriage and family cannot eventually absorb' (Marcus, 2000, p. 342). The convent is simply another option with which the threat of these erotic bodies is neutralised.

Work

Contrary to other films studied in this thesis, characters' work is not a secondary aspect of their identities, but a key facet of plot and setting. Particularly in the cases of *Anna* and *Suor Letizia*, ambiguous conclusions are reached concerning the emancipatory potential of women's work. This final section examines how portrayals of nuns' work give space to alternative representations of femininity, whilst ultimately returning women to delimited spaces

Protagonists' professional competence is underlined in these films. In *Anna*, her *bravura* is dwelt upon at length, and is at the heart of the question over whether she is ready to take her perpetual vows. The *madre superiora* recognises Anna's skills, saying 'lei è un'ottima infermiera: il suo zelo, la sua abilità, l'hanno resa indispensabile qui', and the doctor Professor Ferri even teases Anna in front of the medical students over her infallible judgement, saying 'mi piacerebbe che lei si sbagliasse qualche volta Suor Anna'. These comments highlight Anna's abilities as a professional, rather than as a woman religious. According to Irigarayan logic, the image of a successful female professional is emancipatory. However, as Paola Bonifazio notes, 'when they do enter the space of productivity, women are confined into a feminized sector [...] which exclusively employs female workers for the type of work required "female skills"' (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 173). The choice of Anna specifically pursuing a nursing career sets her character within the acceptably feminine profession of care work, atoning for her past transgressions. Babini suggests that audiences only pardon Anna's sinful past because she becomes both a nun *and* a nurse (covering both religious and lay bases for redemption); 'a sole career in nursing was likely to be judged as not rewarding enough by the Italian public' (Babini, 2012, p. 35).¹⁵⁵

Suor Letizia also portrays its protagonist as an exceptional professional. Letizia is chosen to go to the floundering convent in San Filippo, because 'con la sua pratica' she is 'molto più adatta', recalling the practical skills which she has picked up on previous missions in 'Africa'. Letizia is treated with deference by the other sisters, who declare themselves unable to manage the convent's finances. Letizia receives much praise from her colleagues, who say 'se non c'era lei! Ha sistemato tutto'. She shows herself as eminently more practical than the other nuns, saying, when they begin to pray about their penury, 'sorelle il Signore

¹⁵⁵ Women often become nuns or nurses in films of this period, for example Lucia in Guido Brignone's *Noi peccatori* (1953), suggesting the acceptability of this female profession.

non può pagare i vostri debiti'. The truth of this observation may have been particularly striking to audiences involved in the intensive economic reconstruction efforts of the 1950s. Letizia is also portrayed as able to integrate and collaborate with the local community; she is admired even by lay people, like the workman who observes, 'in gamba la madre!'. Such portrayals, although fictitious, reflect modernising aspirations of Vatican II and Cardinal Suenens that nuns might integrate with local communities (Suenens, 1963, p. 18). The competence with which Anna and Letizia undertake their work is represented as a motivating factor for their staying in the convent space. In fact, more than the protagonists' faith, work is underlined as the nuns' passion and *raison d'être*. As such, films test out new secular gender roles within the safe space of the convent.

Portrayals of the protagonists with money are also interestingly present in the films, and unusual for cinema of this time. Anna's attitude to money is the strongest indicator of her upright morality. It is made clear to the audience that Anna – when she worked as a nightclub dancer – would have been more than able to increase her wealth and popularity by consorting with clients. However, she rejects that lifestyle, replying to the manager's invitation to take a drink with a client, 'mi dispiace ma per contratto sono obbligata a fare dei numeri, non a sedermi al tavolo dei suoi clienti'. We are allowed to know explicitly how much Anna earns, when the manager retorts, 'di che cosa si lamenta? Non le bastano quindici mila lire a sera?'. The knowledge of Anna's generous salary (approximately two hundred pounds a night in today's terms) increases our admiration for the moral financial choices she makes; refusing to become a glorified prostitute, choosing the *terre-à-terre* Andrea as a fiancé, and eventually giving up her opulent lifestyle for that of a nun.

Letizia is also portrayed as having a moral and matter-of-fact relationship to money. As well as pragmatism, Letizia is shown to have a keen grasp of financial management. In a scene set up for comedic value, she ties in knots the two men who are buying the convent at San Filippo, demanding that they pay the taxes, debts, and expenses of the convent's closure. She combines shrewd knowledge of housing law – 'quel terreno è esente da tasse fino al 1986, legge del 3 Novembre 1933' – with swift mathematical skills – '15 lire all'anno per trent'anni. Quanto fa- [...] Fa 450 mila lire'. The men are aghast, and ask her, 'ma, lei ha una laurea in legge?', when she holds up three fingers, they exclaim 'tre lauree?!', to which she responds simply, 'terza elementare'.¹⁵⁶ Rather than Letizia's capability being portrayed as threatening, it is always a source of comedy; the unexpected and unusual nature of a religious woman dominating and turning to her advantage a situation using financial negotiation is portrayed as amusing.

Even Rita in *La novice* is set up as a character with shrewd financial sense. In the film, she is shown as immediately interesting herself in the affairs of her father's domain, watching her mother interact with an agricultural subcontractor and asking her about the management of the estate. Later, Rita takes it upon

¹⁵⁶ Later in the film, Suor Letizia manages to manipulate these men again. In another comedic moment, the man who was supposed to buy the convent leaves furious, his companion explaining: 'cinque mila lire [...] se l'è fatto fregare! Li ha dati al convento!'.

herself to question her father's lawyer on the finances and legal status of the domain. Finally, Rita proposes marriage to Giuliano, foregrounding the financial conditions of the arrangement:

Pour la domaine: deux cent vingt millions, soit dix millions de rentes. Je suis obligée d'en laisser la moitié à maman, ainsi il ne me restera que cinq cent mille lires pour moi [...] ce n'est pas un rêve c'est un marché.

[For the domain : two hundred and twenty million, or ten million in annuities. I am obliged to leave half to mother, so there will be five hundred thousand Lire left for me [...] this isn't a fairytale, it's a transaction.]

These portrayals of the protagonists managing their money suggest an agency and emancipation which allows them superiority and control over the men they encounter. Anna does not have to bend to the will of her male customers, Letizia is not exploited by dodgy dealers, and Rita is not dispossessed of her inheritance. These portrayals somewhat refute Hipkins' affirmation that financially shrewd women in postwar film must always pay the price with a disastrous narrative arc (Hipkins, 2007, p. 101).¹⁵⁷ Instead, religious women successfully manage money – and men – to their own ends. Again, we must ask ourselves whether women religious are allowed this behaviour because their work is reassuringly traditional. Nuns lack the threat of prostitutes or business women, because they can less be suspected of overthrowing patriarchal social structures.

The role of work in the destinies of the characters, particularly Anna and Letizia, is shown to be invaluable. Bonifazio argues that 'work empowered and regenerated the male citizen' in post-World War Two Italy (2011, p. 163). Can the same be said of the female citizen? In *Anna*, the protagonist expresses the belief that the convent has given her fulfillment that she could never find elsewhere, 'qualcosa che non sapevo esistesse, qualcosa che ho sempre cercato, senza rendermene conto'. Nonetheless, this 'qualcosa' may be deliberately ambiguous in the film. Anna describes her commitment in the following terms: 'i medici, i malati, le suore, hanno bisogno di me. Tu non capisci cosa vuol dire quando ti accorgi che hanno bisogno di te'. Anna articulates her vocation through a sense of being needed, of 'self-sacrifice [...] love of service and complete dedication to others' (Babini, 2012, p. s27), which 'is among the core stereotypical values [attached] to nurses' (Babini, 2012, p. s27). Sacrifice and service were also bastions of ideal (Catholic) femininity at this time, and Anna's statement could be read as recasting nuns' work into traditional discourse about womanhood. Certainly Morreale reads Anna's statement as such, saying: 'la "vocazione" di Anna non è la ricerca di Dio [...] ma l'impegno nei confronti degli altri' (Morreale, 2011, p. 259), and that 'più e prima che una suora, è un'infermiera' (Morreale, 2011, p. 259). I would take this

¹⁵⁷ Hipkins' study (2007) looks at prostitute figures in post-World War Two Italian cinema, and should thus be recognised for examining a wholly more socially and morally threatening type of female figure than those of this chapter.

observation one step further, and say that, *più e prima che una suora, Anna è una donna*, because caring and emotional labour are so gendered to women, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. Although Anna's work satisfies and saves her, it is nevertheless articulated around conventional models of female sacrifice and service.

Duty and service feature strongly in Anna's work. At the climax of the film Anna is trapped between the hospital behind her, and Andrea waiting for her, when multiple ambulances carrying emergency casualties arrive at the hospital gates – an occurrence that she interprets as a sign from God. Her choice to stay is one of duty. This duty is also expounded by Professor Ferri who counsels her, 'sono gli sconosciuti che arrivano qua a chiedere il nostro aiuto, che poi se ne vanno dopo qualche tempo senza conoscerci, e senza dirci grazie [...] nella vita, bisogna anche sapere perdere'. Anna refigures this loss in the lexis of the emotional labourer who gains through sacrifice. Her reply, and the final pronouncement of the film, 'non ho perduto, Professore, non ho perduto', perfectly summarises the ambiguity of the working woman in Lattuada's film. On the one hand, Anna has won – indeed the original line in the 1951 script was in fact 'non ho perduto professore, ho vinto'.¹⁵⁸ The accompanying image of Anna standing in front of the doctor, waiting for her surgical mask to be tied for her, suggests a personal victory and empowerment.



Figure 56 'Non ho perduto' says Anna as she prepares for surgery in *Anna*

We leave her, a confident nurse, valued by her colleagues and patients, and with a strong sense of religious and moral vocation. Work, then, is shown to emancipate and regenerate the female citizen. The adaptation of Anna's final line to 'non ho perduto', however, reflects the ambiguity of Anna's victory. Anna is not able to be proclaimed a winner, but neither is she a loser. Does Anna's triumph refer to her resistance of her

¹⁵⁸ The original 1951 script for *Anna* is available to be viewed at the *Cinéma-thèque Nationale* in Paris, France.

own sexuality? This conclusion would corroborate Bayman's observation that melodrama offered 'deplorable tale[s] of moral transgression' (Bayman, 2004, p. 1) only to reinstate a correct (and conservative) moral order. Or, is Anna arguing that to care for others and sacrifice oneself is not a loss? This too would point towards a validation of femininity as service; the woman who chooses God and duty over self and sex is victorious.

Conclusion

Either of the above readings of Anna's narrative valorises reassuringly traditional models of femininity. Yet, as in *Suor Letizia* and *La novice*, these portrayals are underscored by representations of nuns' as skilled, valuable, and capable. It is this combination of daring shows of female agency with a lexicon of female service and duty which creates ambiguity around female work in these films. Nuns present a unique example of working women; like *sarte*, they are associated with traditionalism and containment, although in reality and cinema their working lives give them access to spaces and roles of agency and variety. It is this range between transgression and reassurance which reflects the historical context in which these films were made. Films echo the ideological 'tug-of-war' (Pojmann, 2013, p. 6) occurring between modernising, conservative, and Catholic currents. The alternative destinies which nun characters are allowed in comparison to other melodramatic heroines may signal that society was reconciling with female agency, or that the convent was a satisfyingly containing conclusion for women. Marcus argues that 1950s Italy was a cocoon, in which transgressive portrayals of women served to both exercise notions of alternative femininity and to reabsorb them into conservative society (Marcus, 2000, p. 342). This chapter may provide an answer to the hypothesised 'institutional reasons that go some way toward explaining this sudden and never to be repeated domination of women in religious' (Scaraffia and Zarri, 1999, p. 299); women religious are both suitably traditional, potentially erotic, and promisingly emancipatory characters in post-World War Two Italian film.

Women religious choose silence. This is, at least, a common contemporary misconception. On first impressions, therefore, they are seemingly an unlikely group of subjects upon whom to conduct oral history interviews. Yet, as well as the falsity of the notion that all nuns are silent, their belonging to an institution and tradition that practises silencing in many forms renders their memories in testimony all the more fascinating. Often taken into religious institutions at a young age, encouraged to forget the self, instructed – some say ‘indoctrinated’ – with an intensive didactic programme, the memories of women religious are shot through with institutional discourse, not least of which is discourse around women’s work.¹⁵⁹ I present here a body of sixteen original oral history interviews with Italian women religious. Engaging with scholarship on both oral history and memory studies, personal and conversion narratives, emotional and affective labour, and existing studies of women religious, this chapter asks how the work of women religious is remembered differently to that of other working women of the post-World War Two period. Historian Adriana Valerio suggests that religious work allowed women to ‘ripensare sé stessa, attraverso inedite possibilità che le si offrivano con l’istruzione, il lavoro e l’impegno missionario’ (Valerio, 2017, p. 186). If we have learned in the other chapters that women’s work may have ‘empowered and regenerated’ the female citizen as it did the male (Bonifazio, 2011, p. 163), we have also observed that women’s work is not discussed in such direct terms of empowerment. Let us remember that this thesis seeks to prove and redress Anna Rossi-Doria’s view of Italian women of the postwar period that ‘il carattere politico del loro agire, non viene in genere riconosciuto come tale né dai contemporanei né dagli storici, e spesso neppure pienamente dalle stesse protagoniste’ (Rossi-Doria, 2000, p. 361). Mirroring this, we have seen that often women do not recognise their labour as work. This issue is assessed in relation to women religious, about whom historian of women religious Carmen Mangion, states ‘while outsiders may have seen women religious as qualified professionals, it seems unlikely that they would have acknowledged themselves in this light’ (Mangion, 2005, p. 234).

The data presented here has two goals: to reveal the work of women religious in all its uniqueness and value, and to assess how it is perceived by the women themselves. This chapter begins by interrogating the Catholic Church’s attitude to women’s – and women religious’ – work, and how it is problematised and obfuscated. Then, examining the oral histories, I argue that women religious use a number of narrative strategies which reflect institutional attitudes, reframing their labour in religious, emotional, and traditional gender discourse. I argue that the result of these narrative strategies is to situate the work of women religious as vocation rather than profession, a fact which echoes wider social and institutional tensions around women as professionals.

¹⁵⁹ Suzanne Campbell-Jones states, ‘religious organisations demand the total commitment of members. They use both alienative and indoctrinating procedures to achieve it’ (Campbell-Jones, 1979, p. 30).

Specifically, this chapter identifies four discursive strategies which situate women religious' work within wider social and institutional discourse. First, the career choices of nuns are described as vocation. Vocation is a term whose border with profession is debated and blurred, and will be fully discussed below. I argue that nuns' accounts of their work cross the border into a territory that firmly situates it as vocation rather than profession. Second, nuns' narratives of work share commonalities with conversion stories. Conversion narratives are a part of established literature on the lives and work of nuns, and are doubtless familiar to women religious through sermons, saints' stories, and training and other religious materials. The section on vocation traces how interviewees narrate and make meaning from their professional lives as religious by using the schemes provided by conversion narratives.¹⁶⁰ Once observed, similarities with conversion stories frame nuns as religious, rather than professional, subjects. Finally, work is described in terms of emotion. I argue here that nuns' descriptions of their work fit into the contemporary theoretical category of emotional and affective labour, but that we can historicise emotional labour for women as an extension of the discourse around female self-sacrifice and giving which has existed throughout history, even if conceptualised differently. Finally, central to this chapter is the argument that there is 'a collective side to the narration of experience; experience is never completely personal, instead, the way in which individuals experience something (and also the way they interpret their experiences) is constructed collectively' (Hovi, 2004, p. 42).

Interviews

The oral histories studied here respond to historian and Dominican sister Margaret MacCurtain's call to 'hear the voices of women religious' (MacCurtain, 1997, p. 58). They were collected in one-off interviews with sixteen women religious aged between seventy-one and ninety-four from three different Roman convents.¹⁶¹ The defining characteristic of interviewees is that they lived and worked in the period between 1945 and 1965. Most of the women were already in religious institutions during these years, although one entered shortly after 1965. I chose Rome for the location of the interviewees for two reasons: First, described as the 'panting heart of Catholicism',¹⁶² and the closest city to the Vatican, Rome has a high

¹⁶⁰ 'According to the general attribution theory, a human being has a need to understand and explain events and experiences within the frame of a larger meaning system' (Hovi, 2004, pp. 39-40).

¹⁶¹ Ten interviewees were from the *Suore Domenicane di Santa Caterina di Siena*, three were from the *Suore adoratrici del preziosissimo sangue di Cristo*, and three from the *Piccole sorelle di Gesù* in Rome.

¹⁶² This phrase was immortalised by Cardinal Wiseman in the nineteenth century in the following line of his eponymous hymn: '*Full in the panting heart of Rome, beneath th'apostle's crowning dome, from pilgrims' lips that kiss the ground, breathes in all tongues only one sound*'. Of this hymn, Judith Champ says, 'Wiseman saw Rome as the heavenly Jerusalem, "the capital of spiritual Christianity"' (Champ, 2000, p. 169).

concentration of religious.¹⁶³ Second, and most importantly, in Rome one can find the mother houses of religious orders, meaning that at any given moment these institutions host women from widely varying origins and experiences who are either passing through the mother houses, or are living out the end of their lives there. This second fact gave a particular richness and variety to the interviews because of the breadth of experience of the women I encountered; from places as diverse as Bari and Vicenza, from seamstresses to war nurses, no two of these women are the same. The interviews were semi-structured, and participants knew only that I wished to know about their lives and work during the post-World War Two period.

The three convents I visited were somewhat different in character. The first two convents, the *Suore Domenicane di Santa Caterina* and the *Suore adoratrici del preziosissimo sangue di Cristo*, are mother houses and *case di riposo*. As such, they welcome retired women who lived and worked both in Italy and abroad in community institutions and missions. The final convent, the *Piccole sorelle di Gesù*, is also a mother house, but is more progressive than the others, in that the sisters do not wear traditional habits, and take up lay work such as factory or administrative jobs. All of the communities are apostolic; an essential prerequisite for being able to study their work.¹⁶⁴

Women's Work & the Catholic Church

In post-World War Two Italian society, women's work was regarded as a sometimes-necessary activity which should be subordinate to women's roles as wives and mothers, conciliating 'attività domestiche ed extradomestiche al prezzo della rinuncia di sé stessa' (La Scuola, 1988, p. 290). Working women were a source of social tension outside of Catholicism. Yet, the work of women religious was doubly controversial, first because of their gender, and second because of their status as religious. In the two *Congressi generali degli stati di perfezione* (in 1950 and 1957), which preceded Vatican II, and indeed in Vatican II itself, the apostolic work of religious was a subject of debate. These congresses and the Church at large grappled with the wish to update and streamline the work of religious, and the desire to differentiate religious from other workers, with the constant preoccupation that 'questo programma di funzionalità e di efficienza creava dei problemi in coloro che puntavano sui voti, perché sembrava che ne sminuisse il valore' (Rocca, 2013, p. 140). Religious communities were concerned that work and faith were incompatible, and 'women's religious and moral vocation were reconciled uneasily with the notion of the female professional' (Gleadle,

¹⁶³ We should appreciate the difference that proximity to the Vatican City makes to the experiences of women religious. Scholar of English women religious, Anselm Nye, told me, 'I remember an interview with an Italian Sister in Rome back in the 1980s which emphasised the fact that "we have to be so quiet here, all around the Pope!"' (Nye, 2017).

¹⁶⁴ Apostolic religious make their classification as workers more straightforward than contemplative religious. Nonetheless, the idea of contemplatives as workers is certainly not to be discounted, and merits further thought and investigation, although it does not fall within the scope of this thesis.

2001, p. 144). The notion that some women chose to become religious because of the work it offered is extrapolated by Giancarlo Rocca, who asserts that, 'da parte di non pochi di essi [religiosi] la vita religiosa era considerata solo come una organizzazione per svolgere meglio l'apostolato' (Rocca, 2013, pp. 145-146).

The very terms in which women religious' work was expressed indicate the tension around it. Work was 'vocation', or 'mission'. Even the contemporary term 'profession' has its etymological roots in the idea of a higher spiritual commitment. This etymological crossover is all the more relevant to women religious, whose work was transformed over the nineteenth century from occupation to profession.¹⁶⁵ As convents and women religious increased globally over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'the responsibilities of women religious became less wide-ranging and more compartmentalised. It is this 'compartmentalisation and the emergence of teaching and nursing as professions [...] that contributed to the acquisition of a professional identity' (Mangion, 2005, p. 224).¹⁶⁶ I argue that tension around women religious as professionals is evident in the oral histories examined in this chapter.

Women religious are counted by the Italian census as professionals, belonging to the group of *professioni tecniche*, in the subgroup *tecnici delle attività religiose e di culto* (ISTAT.it, 2017).¹⁶⁷ The turn to apostolic rather than enclosed orders – and thus to professional work studied in this thesis – came at the end of the 1800s (Valerio, 2017, p. 185). In terms of what has happened to Catholic discourse around women and work since 1965. Vatican II does not appear to have changed the work of the women I interviewed.¹⁶⁸ Some of the decisions of Vatican II led to the restructuring of religious organisations to mimic the industrial changes of Italy's economic boom.¹⁶⁹ Vatican II also saw an enthusiastic promotion of women's apostolic work, particularly by Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens (1963). All of the nuns with whom I spoke had worked 'in the world' both within lay and non-Catholic communities. Usually, the roles they fulfilled were nonetheless in Catholic organisations such as schools or hospitals frequented by laypeople but, in the case of the *Piccole sorelle di Gesù*, the women had even worked within secular organisations.

¹⁶⁵ 'The expansion of the provision of higher education and the emphasis on technical training for many occupations resulted in an expansion of nineteenth-century occupations that can be termed "professional." Teaching and nursing were two of those occupations upgraded to professional status' (Mangion, 2005, p. 229).

¹⁶⁶ Nursing was a profession both recognised and celebrated by the Church, in occasions such as the International Congress of Catholic Nurses in 1936, suggesting that, in the period leading up to the one under study, it fit into both Fascist and Catholic ideals of acceptable female work (Pollard, 2008, p. 96).

¹⁶⁷ Let it be noted that this group includes monks and general *religiosi*, but is differentiated from *Specialisti in discipline religiose e teologiche* who count among them *parrocchi, sacerdoti, vescovi* and *abati* – all positions currently barred to women in the Catholic church.

¹⁶⁸ We might also ask ourselves to what extent official church policy was actually applied to the lived realities of women religious, since many scholars suggest that from medieval times, communities of women religious simply doffed the cap to patriarchal order, and then quietly continued their business as they wished.

¹⁶⁹ Other measures which echoes capitalist labour strategies included the idea that, 'i superiori non venivano più scelti in base a criteri spirituali – la "cura d'anime" che essi avrebbero dovuto esercitare nei confronti dei loro sudditi –, ma in base a criteri manageriali, cioè se fossero stati o no in grado di dirigere come buoni amministratori le opere apostoliche' (Rocca, 2013, p. 131).

Vocation & Conversion Narratives

Seeing work as vocation rather than profession was very much on the Catholic agenda at this time. Exemplifying this, the *Gioventù Italiana di Azione Cattolica di Treviso* published a short work entitled 'La professione come vocazione' in 1959.¹⁷⁰ Although we have talked about women's work generally, this chapter makes a clear distinction between vocation, labour, and profession. Vocation is known to be a 'species of the genus profession' (Cogan, 1955, p. 106), and yet the two terms differ quite significantly in meaning. From the Latin *vocare*, vocation 'refers to a divine call in the sense of being fit for something, talented in something' (Coquillet, 1994, p. 1271). In contrast, professional work refers to educated work, responsibility, self-organisation, and altruism (Cogan, 1955, p. 106). Professions are class-bound, conventionally referring to white-collar work. Different again is labour, which Hannah Arendt defines as the activities necessary to fulfil basic needs, and associated with pain and hardship (Arendt, 1998, p. 80).

Nun's work, therefore, is best qualified as profession, yet this chapter underlines how it is described by women themselves as vocation. What a profession has, and a vocation lacks, according to Daniel Coquillet, is a sense of individual motivation and accountability; 'being called by your talent to a particular job does not require anything from you' (Coquillet, 1994, p. 1272). This section explores the frequent accounts of interviewees' 'vocation moments' - their first recollections of desiring or deciding on their roles as religious - and how they attribute these moments to their communities or faith, rather than claiming them as their own. Vocation stories support a narrative of nuns' labour being part of a higher calling in which they have little agency, blurring their identities as professionals and as religious. As one sister puts it, 'quello che facciamo sta scritto in cielo [...] che noi facciamo del bene e del male, è tutto scritto lì' (Liotti, 2017). Although it is neither my wish nor intention to 'demystify' these women's vocations, it is interesting to identify the recurrent features and descriptions of them, in order to argue that nuns' self-identification as professionals 'would have secularised their efforts' (Mangion, 2005, p. 234).

Vocation also shares a border with conversion. Like vocation, conversion suggests a 'turning point, l'evento che marca la discontinuità tra la fase biografica precedente e successiva' (Pannofino, 2012, p. 1). Conversion narratives constitute a considerable literary corpus, and span many religions. Yet, they exhibit many consistent features, which lead some scholars to argue that they are often 'not so much composed as recited', and that 'the pattern is so plain as to give the experiences the appearance of a stereotype' (Morgan, 1965, pp. 71-2). The value of telling one's own religious story is contested between communities and religions. In seventeenth-century Baptist congregations, some believed 'to forget a work of God (a "crumb" that could be preserved) was offensive and sinful' (Adcock, 2011, p. 212), whereas for the Benedictines, 'storytelling opportunities are few because narrative performances are discouraged' (Reidhead & Reidhead, 2003, p. 193). O'Donaghue and Potts list numerous religious orders where doctrine

¹⁷⁰ This work can be consulted in the libraries of Biblioteca diocesana del Seminario Vescovile, or Biblioteca delle Discepoli del Vangelo di Castelfranco.

discourages its religious from telling personal stories (2004, p. 475). Maria Pia Di Bella looks at two historical examples of conversion in Italy, and concludes that the act of speaking is a way of confirming one's religious belonging (2003, p. 90). Michel Foucault contends that Catholic confession is a technology of the self that has created the modern subject (1979, p. 58). The vocation stories told here reflect a desire to portray identity and work within a religious narrative. These vocation stories not only describe the individual, but the community and institutions which formed them. They show the 'ways in which conversion [...] plays a major role in inserting the individual in [...] a collectivity' (Di Bella, 2003, p. 85), 'mark[ing] the boundaries of the community' (Hovi, 2004, p. 48), rather than the individual.

Most of the interviewees entered religious orders in their youth, the majority moving directly from the family to the convent. Some of the women held other jobs before they took vows, and a few had fully-fledged careers as teachers or nurses before entering, but most developed their professions as religious. The average age at which my interviewees took their first vows was just over eighteen years old, with a range of fourteen to thirty-four. Age was a significant aspect of women's accounts of their first vocations, especially in the cases of those who felt it was particularly early or late. Sister d'Annunzio exemplifies this: 'dice mio papà che avevo dodici anni quando ho cominciato a chiedere di fare il postulato. Dice mia mamma che avevo quattro anni e mezzo [...] non so come mai a dodici anni ho cominciato a dire "voglio farmi suora, voglio farmi suora"' (d'Annunzio, 2017). Another sister outdoes this, saying:

Io sono nata con la vocazione penso, perché avevo cinque anni e si parlava del fatto dei comunisti che ammazzavano i sacerdoti, e io avevo cinque anni ma ho risposto con quel senso di sicurezza. Mi dice [mia madre] 'sicura che ti vuoi fare suora?', e io dicevo, 'sì che mi faccio suora' (Pappacena, 2017).

Accounts of interviewees 'hearing the call' at a young age casts their decision as mystical vocation rather than practical choice.

The general trend, however, appears to be that interviewees were attracted to the religious life through direct contact with women religious in their environments. Taking the above testimony from Sister d'Annunzio, she first affirms 'non lo so come mai a dodici anni ho cominciato a dire "voglio farmi suora"', but later asserts that 'c'era qualche suora, qualche amica che era già partita' (d'Annunzio, 2017). Although she evidently does not make the connection herself, this sister had been exposed to women religious at a young age. Sister Zuzolo recounts a moving story of 'una suora a Roma che era una paesana mia'. She narrates how this sister visited her village for the first time since the beginning of the war, to find that the German troops had destroyed the village's access to safe water. Arriving at the interviewee's house, the nun asked the interviewee's mother for a glass of water:

Allora l'ha dato un bicchiere d'acqua e cosa ha fatto? Ha fatto il segno della croce prima di bere, ha cominciato a pregare, e le sono uscite due lacrime. Io vedendo questa suora così mi pareva di vedere un angelo. Dicevo 'questa è un angelo venuto a salvarci della guerra'. Allora ho cominciato a dire 'io mi voglio fare suora, io mi voglio fare suora' (Zuzolo, 2017).

Another interviewee comments, 'io ho scelto il convento come la mia zia, la sorella di mio papà, era suora anche lei come me' (Albini, 2017). These accounts attest to the powerful impact of other women religious as role models, and evoke the community and family space as the background for professional inspiration.

The impact of female religious role models in the community is reiterated by those who went to school with nuns. The presence of religious in education had always been a key policy of the Catholic Church, and this intensified during the period in question.¹⁷¹ In Italy, as in Ireland, nuns 'dominated and controlled women's health and education' (McKenna, 2006a, p. 194), with around 200,000 male and female religious running schools, hospitals and charitable initiatives in the 1950s (Pollard, 2008, p. 122). Many interviewees echo the sentiment of Sister Zimbaro who says, 'mi è venuta la vocazione che io dicevo a mia mamma "mamma mi voglio fare suora con quelle con cui vado lì [a scuola]" [...] erano tutte belle, tutte calme, tutte sorridenti. Ha fatto un po' di impressione [...] e sentivo la vocazione' (Zimbaro, 2017).¹⁷² Sisters also note the rural village as the backdrop to many vocations. For example, Sister Liotti tells of how a group of Franciscan monks visited her village, saying 'I fagioli seminavamo, quindi io andavo ad ascoltare la sera ritornando dalla campagna. Quindi andavo ad ascoltare questo prete, e mi è venuta la vocazione di farmi suora così' (Liotti, 2017). It is interesting to note that community spaces – family, school, village – take prominence in vocation narratives. Tuija Hovi notes of conversion narratives:

To be converted, an individual must have already adequately internalized the tradition in question to be able to accept its explanatory models. [...] A religious home or contact with an inspiring personality, a significant other, as the representatives of symbolic interactionism categorize such an inspiration (Hovi, 2004, pp. 40-41).

¹⁷¹ 'Il programma di Pio XII è lucido: la chiesa si qualifica come educatrice di uomini e di popoli per la ricostruzione mondiale' (Riccardi, 1988, p. 24). Rocca notes the fierce competition between religious teaching orders: 'V'era poi la deplorabile concorrenza delle religiose tra loro in ambito educativo, con disagio economico ed apostolico' (Rocca, 2013, p. 134).

¹⁷² Included in the schools where nuns taught were the *scuole di taglio e cucito*, mentioned by several interviewees. Sister Zimbaro encountered nuns, 'che facevano la scuola di taglio' (Zimbaro, 2017) after she finished the *quinta*. Other of her *consorelle* recount, 'chiudo finisco la scuola mamma dice "senti del suore aprono un laboratorio di maglieria tu vai lì e impari il mestiere"' (Jacopini, 2017), and 'mia madre poi mi mandò a ricamare [dalle suore], perché ci teneva che imparassi a ricamare e a cucire' (Colucci, 2017).

We can observe these lines being drawn in testimony between individual and community, and vocation and conversion.

The link between the nuns' identities and their families is one of the clearest features of the interviews. Fifteen of the total sixteen interviewees mentioned their families, and the word *famiglia* alone was uttered seventy-five times throughout the corpus. Often, the interviewee's family would be brought up immediately in response to an introductory question, such as 'when were you born?', eliciting responses like 'io sono nata il 26 dicembre del '32. E allora sono di una famiglia poverissima' (Zuzolo, 2017). Interviewees identified themselves carefully and explicitly within the family unit, explaining their choices and experiences in direct relation to, and within the context of, the other members of that unit. Parents, particularly, play a prominent role in these accounts; in the sixteen interviews, the word 'mother' is mentioned 174 times, and 'father' on 104 occasions.¹⁷³ In the case of ten of the Dominican sisters, the community allowed nuns to visit and be visited by their families, something which was not common to all orders at the time. One woman explicitly says that this was the reason she chose that particular order, stating, 'io ero legatissima alla famiglia' (Zeppi, 2017). Here I study references to families in relation to women's vocations, and argue that the inclusion of the family in accounts of what was essentially a professional choice, contributes to these stories becoming about a community rather than an individual, and about religion rather than profession.

Families are narrated as having given interviewees the example of piety which then inspired them to vocation. Sister Pilotti describes how 'la famiglia [...] è quello che mi ha veramente toccato', and remembers her mother giving food to the poor, stating 'quella tenerezza della mamma verso i bisognosi. [...] Io dentro mi sono detta "come mi piacerebbe di essere suora!"' (Pilotti, 2017). The reaction of family members to their daughters' vocations also appears important to the telling of interviewees' vocation stories. The giving of parental permission was a feature of these accounts which emerged as a source of both inspiration and conflict. One woman explains:

La mamma mi faceva vedere e capire che non era contenta e mi voleva provare per vedere se avevo la vocazione. Questo l'ho saputo dopo. [sorridente] Quando sono entrata nel momento in cui lei ha deciso di farmi entrare in convento, lei in treno mi chiedeva quasi scusa, dice 'senti io ti ho voluto provare' (Pappacena, 2017).

Several sisters tell tales of their parents despairing at their vocations:

¹⁷³ I have added together the numbers for the Italian terms *mamma* and *madre*, and *papà* and *padre* to reach my totals.

Quando io sono partita da casa mia mamma è svenuta e mi ha detto ‘cocca, mi togli cent'anni di vita’, perché ero la prima bimba che partiva da casa. [...] L'unica cosa che mi ha detto mio babbo era, ‘Cocca [...] non capisci niente che vai a fare’. Dico, ‘imparerò a capire’ (Jacopini, 2017).

These oral histories recount religious vocation as a communal, familial experience. Hovi notes of conversion stories that, ‘there is a tendency to interpret even difficult experiences and harmful drawbacks as constructive steps towards one’s Christian conviction’ (Hovi, 2004, p. 41). The nuns articulate parental objection as an obstacle on the path to fulfilment.¹⁷⁴

In the brief moments in which the interviewees reflect directly on themselves and their characters, the relevance of families again stands out. As with the interviews I undertook with seamstresses, one of my goals when interviewing women religious was to ask them how they perceived themselves and how their work had influenced their character. However, after a number of attempts, it was clear that asking these women to reflect on themselves as individuals was immensely difficult.¹⁷⁵ As before, a number of them made reference to their families to explain their own personalities, saying ‘ho sempre avuto il carattere, sì. Tutta la famiglia, [...] è un carattere di famiglia’ (Albini, 2017). Sister d’Annunzio is yet more explicit in her response:

Il carattere – come dicevo prima – a me tutti quanti – non dovrei dire – però c’è un carattere— [...] loro mi dicevano una cosa, io me ne vanterei, alla mamma, alle cose buone, sono sempre, sono sempre abbastanza, abbastanza – insomma, dicono, lo dicono tutti, non lo dico io – dicono ‘ti va tutto bene a te’. C’era quella direttrice che mi diceva sempre ‘a te ti casca giù la casa, ti sposti di là [mostra di spostarsi dall’altra parte] e rimani assolta’ [ride] così diceva eh. Sarà una parte del carattere insomma. [...] Tutti dicono che assomiglio a mia mamma, e mia mamma era così (d’Annunzio, 2017).

Although not always clearly articulated, this testimony demonstrates not only the difficulty for interviewees to reflect on their own personalities, but the essential ties between self and the family in nuns’ oral histories. The inclusion of families in vocation stories echoes Hovi’s assertion of personal narratives of

¹⁷⁴ Even in the cases where the interviewees recount the happiness of their families, for example those who said, ‘vai pure, siamo contenti, ma pensaci bene’ (Albini, 2017), the judgement of families is evidently very important to subjects’ vocation stories.

¹⁷⁵ In contrast, Yvonne McKenna notes that, ‘though women religious tend to be seen in plural terms, in relation to each other and the convent or congregation to which they belong, the women spoke in terms of themselves as individuals’ (McKenna, 2006a, p. 13).

conversion that 'the way in which individuals experience something (and also the way they interpret their experiences) is constructed collectively' (Hovi, 2004, p. 42).

Nowhere is this more evident than where accounts of family traumas influence or inspire interviewees' vocations, of which there are a surprising number. Sister Zuzolo recounts the story of her father being captured by the Nazis.¹⁷⁶ She details how he hid and fled from occupying Nazi forces for a prolonged period, before he was finally captured and taken to a concentration camp:

[See video 'Zuzolo Father Nazis excerpt']

Ed è scappato via, e mio padre ci ha messo quattro mesi per arrivare a casa. A piedi. Camminava tutta la notte. [...] Io adesso ho la venerazione dei rifugiati. C'hanno una cosa, ho un'adorazione. Quando li vedo mi sento male pensando che anche papà era così. [...] Io penso sempre a mio padre. Dico 'vedi, guarda quello che abbiamo noi, con la mensa. E possono prendere qualche cosa per mangiare.' Ma mio padre? (Zuzolo, 2017).

Zuzolo's testimony was recounted to demonstrate how a family trauma influenced her vocation to help others, as she does now providing charity to refugees of war. Zuzolo directly linked this traumatic experience and her decision to do religious work, saying 'sono cose che ti restano dentro. E questo è il terrore della guerra, il terrore proprio. E poi io sono partita per l'Africa dopo che sono diventata suora' (Zuzolo, 2017). Again, the reason attributed to her professional zeal is located firmly in the familial. Several of my interviewees recall the deaths of their parents as having motivated their vocations. Crying, Sister Pappacena remembers how her mother died suddenly just weeks after she entered the convent:

¹⁷⁶ The full text relating to the capture of Zuzolo's father reads as follows: 'In paese mio c'era la prima linea dei tedeschi. E loro maltrattavano la gente, facevano di tutto. E mio padre per non andare in guerra, perché facevano il rastrellamento, no? Andavano dietro a tutti gli uomini, giovani e vecchi per portarli in guerra, per portarli con loro in prima linea. E allora mio padre stava nascosto. Non andava a lavorare, non poteva uscire, solo di notte. Era una esperienza bruttissima. Poi si vede che hanno visto che mio padre stava lì, e una notte sono venuti a cercarlo. Papà ha fatto in tempo a nascondersi sotto terra, perché c'era una cataratta, la cataratta è una scalata interna che porta dal primo piano a sottoterra, dove ci sono le cantine. E lui si è nascosto. Loro cercavano papà, mamma diceva che non c'era, che era andato via, che era in guerra. E allora ci hanno buttati per terra tutti i bambini, e hanno portato via tutto: materassi, mobili, hanno aperto i mobili. Portavano via tutta la roba. E noi eravamo per terra, faceva freddo c'era la neve. E mia madre diceva "lasciate almeno un po' di roba per questi bambini", e loro invece hanno portato via tutto. E questo mi è rimasto proprio—perché mamma ci raccontava sempre, che dopo papà era uscito la mattina, ha chiamato mamma, l'ha fatto vedere a papà la casa spoglia. E immagina i pianti di papà, diceva "a questo punto io mi arrendo, vado", e mia mamma diceva di no. Infatti, loro hanno preso il mio papà che papà andava a messa la domenica di nascosto alle quattro. Perché noi eravamo cattolici. E hanno preso papà e se lo sono portato. E mamma è rimasta con questi sei figli senza niente, pur le pentole le pentole di rame perché a quella volta avevamo le pentole di rame. [...] Avevamo la tessera, che avevamo 250g da mangiare di basta. Però non ti bastava, 200g di pane, 250g di pasta, cosa ci facevi? Allora mamma poverella, ce l'ha fatto mia madre. E mio padre l'hanno mandato in Germania' (Zuzolo, 2017).

[See video 'Pappacena Mother Death excerpt']

Perdendo la mamma ho cominciato a— [...] Da quella volta io sinceramente la mia vocazione è stata una vocazione seria [...]. Mi sono impegnata. Mi commuovo. [piange] perché mi dicevo, 'devo fare la suora'.

Quindi è stata proprio spinta da questa cosa?

Sì. Penso 'se mamma sa qualche cosa, ecco— devo fare la suora, devo farmi suora.' Mi sono impegnata. [...] La mia vocazione era vissuta un po' come per fare contenta mamma. [piange] Con il fatto di essere—mi commuovo, sono cose sentite (Pappacena, 2017).

Another sister recalls how she had dreamt of her deceased mother after her first visit to the convent; 'sull'autobus ho sognato mia mamma che disse "sei andata a Roma?" [...]. E tornando giù ho cominciato a giurare che volevo farmi suora' (d'Annunzio, 2017). Recollections like these reinforce the impact of family trauma in memory, highlighting that they are indeed 'cose sentite', perceived as significant enough to influence the professional choices of those they affect. Trauma is also a classic inclusion in conversion narratives, which articulate vocation around 'a moment of epiphany, when a traumatic or seemingly chaotic past is revealed as the subtle handiwork of a benevolent God' (Buckser & Glazier, 2003, p. xii). The effect of referencing family trauma – as is the case in conversion narratives – is that the vocation decision is portrayed as a spiritual one, influenced by faith and community.

There are those who recount their initial contact with, or calling to, the religious life as a struggle in itself, with the evocation of a 'travaglio interiore' (Colomba, 2017) as typical.¹⁷⁷ Several interviewees explain this as a result of negative experiences with nuns from their youth. Sister Jacopini describes:

Siccome in quel tempo là per le suore tutto era peccato, io mi ricordo che una volta nel catechismo una ci raccontò che ballare era malizia senza malizia, tutte queste robe qua, che ci facevano male davvero, non fastidio. Non volevamo sentirle perché per noi erano tutte cose belle, e di male non vedevamo niente. Ma tempi indietro era così purtroppo. Anche per la paura che ci facevano. Quindi io non ci volevo andare dalle suore, dicevo, 'no mamma no mamma no' (Jacopini, 2017).

Another sister remembers how she and her little brother went to a school ran by nuns, much to his chagrin:

¹⁷⁷ Here again there is a crossover with McKenna's findings, that 'those who had a less than positive view of religious and, more specifically, the religious they were familiar with, had difficulty reconciling the draw they felt towards religious life themselves' (McKenna, 2006a, p. 201).

A cinque anni riflettevo 'come sono cattive queste suore. Se sapessero quanto sta soffrendo mio fratello e quanto sto soffrendo io'. E io con la brutta impressione che mi sono fatta di queste suore mi sarei dovuta mai fare suora. Mai. Per questa cosa che ancora la sento dentro. Ma era così al tempo. [...] Le suore non è che mi piacevano tanto, e mi sarebbe piaciuto così tanto farmi suora! (Pappacena, 2017).

Acknowledging the unlikelihood of their subsequent vocations, these interviewees separate themselves temporally from these negative experiences with the words, 'tempi indietro era così' (Jacopini, 2017), and 'ma era così al tempo' (Pappacena, 2017), suggesting that their own vocations – although formed by these negative experiences – then broke with or built away from previous identities of women religious into something more positive and modern. Such descriptions echo Edmund Morgan's 'morphology of conversion', one stage of which sees a 'struggle between faith and doubt' (Morgan, 1965, p. 72), and Pannofino's description of the necessary 'episodio di rottura' (Pannofino, 2012) in conversion narratives.

I was also interested to find numerous interviewees describe the moral or practical struggle which they experienced in their first vocations. Contrasting strongly with the interviews which spoke of mystical spiritual callings at a young age, a number of women's tales were permeated with discomfort. The word *lotta* and its derivatives were used in this context by four of the interviewees, in statements like:

Ero laica, laica in tutti i sensi. [...] E ho lottato molto per dire di sì, perché avevo un lavoro che mi piaceva, perché mi sono preparata cinque anni per andare lì [dove lavoravo], era un'esperienza molto bella per me. [...] Non sapevo bene da dove veniva questa idea, se me l'ero messa in testa io, di dove veniva. Ma il Signore ha il suo linguaggio, ti indica un altro cammino (Abastanotti, 2017).

This interview highlights that becoming a nun was not only a religious choice, but a practical one, which this sister ultimately valued over an existing and fulfilling career. Similarly, Sister Colomba recounts, 'un po' così è stato un momento di lotta questa decisione qui. Ma non perché—ma perché consacrarmi al Signore in questa forma non è stato facile' (Colomba, 2017). Sister Jacopini, who previously stated 'le suore non le sopportavo' (Jacopini, 2017) also recalls her internal turmoil at hearing her calling:

Un giorno bellissimo che ancora mi commuovo, a scuola io chiedo alla suora di mandarmi in bagno. Vado al bagno e c'erano le suore che stavano pregando, la superiora che era in tribuna e faceva quel suono piano piano sull'organo e sotto queste suore che pregavano. E mi ha fatto qualcosa

dentro che sembrava che il resto scemasse quasi. [...] Andavo là a sentire le suore [...] Un giorno in chiesa pregavo e piangevo perché dicevo ‘Signore a chi le dico queste robe qua? Si può sapere che vuoi?’ E allora cominciavo piangevo e pregavo e mi sento bussare la porta della scristiana [soffia il naso], mi chiama la Priora e dice, ‘senti, ti vedo tanto strana: una volta sei arrabbiata, delle volte ridi come una scema, alle volte piangi, alle volte non parli con nessuno, ma che ti sta passando non sei più tu?’ [ho risposto] ‘niente niente niente’. Ero lì che pregavo il Signore per mandarmi qualcuno e lì ‘niente niente niente’. [...] Dopo circa un anno non era neanche passato sei mesi forse, mi chiama la Priora, disse ‘senti io devo andare a Roma perché ho finito il mio mandato. Se tu pensi di entrare’ - io non avevo mai parlato di entrare, ma quel sentire, ‘ma tu pensi di entrare’ – ‘dove!’ - e diceva – ‘a farti suora’ – ‘davvero??’. Allora sono esplosa, e non mi ha tenuto più nessuno (Jacopini, 2017).

This highly sensory and emotive account suggests an astounding professional and personal fulfilment and a dramatic resolution to an existential struggle. Narratives of spiritual, moral, and practical struggles in the oral histories provide a counterpoint to those who portray themselves as born to their vocation, but still fit with canonical conversion accounts of ‘faith in its proper imperfection’ (Morgan, 1965, p. 72). Struggle becomes an important part of the vocation story; it portrays the decision to become a nun as a spiritual conversion.

Finally, discussions of love and romance also appear in a number of women’s recollections of their vocations. Sister Fortuna explains that she first felt her vocation when ‘I was teaching when two sisters passed – it was a time of war – [...] and I spoke with them, and I fell in love with them’ (Fortuna, 2017).¹⁷⁸ Similarly, another sister discusses seeing nuns in her village and says ‘nel mio paese le suore avevano seminato questa, la preghiera [...] sempre sempre sempre l’amore vero’ (Pilotti, 2017). Apart from this romantic lexis to describe other women religious, some of the interviewees recount tales of secular romance which led them to their vocation. As in the films of Chapter 5, romance is presented as the catalyst to religious vocation. Sister Albini mentions, ‘io avevo un ragazzo, ma io sentivo che non era—mi dicevo, “perché non gli vuoi bene?”. Ma io sentivo che lui mi voleva bene. Certo non era la mia strada’ (Albini, 2017). Another sister compares her romantic experiences with her religious calling, saying:

Ed erano tre che mi torturavano: uno era Beppe lui era forse il più vero di tutti i tre perché quando gli occhi si incontravano lui diventava rosso io invece come un peperone. E secondo me passava qualche cosa di forte di, di- ecco. Gino era quello che avevo dietro le spalle che quando mi davano sette mi vergognavo e lui se ne accorgeva perché diventavo rossa, lui mi prendeva i capelli – avevo

¹⁷⁸ Sister Fortuna spoke in English, French, and Italian during our interview. I quote her here in the language she chose at that moment.

la coda di cavallo fin qua giù, rossa – lui mi prendeva questi capelli me li lisciava mi faceva, “non ti preoccupare perché io ti voglio bene lo stesso”. [...] Invece il terzo mi insegnava sempre a ballare, perché noi alla scuola facevamo qualche festicciola di compleanno così, quattro saltarelli facevo con lui. [...] Mi metteva la mano sulle spalle io avevo tutte le zizzole dentro e dico “ma che cosa fa” [fa un gesto di panico]. [Quando dopo ho sentito la vocazione] da lì [fa un gesto per dire che tutto è partito da quel momento] ha preso fuoco. Non ho pensato più né a Gino né a Beppe. [...] Ho sentito una soddisfazione diversa che mi riempiva il cuore, non era superficiale come le altre. Io un po' da quella volta cercavo di allontanarmi, di allontanarli (Anonymous, 2017).¹⁷⁹

There are many similarities between this statement and another testimony from Sister Colucci, who describes a boy who was almost unknown to her attempting to convince her parents that he must marry her, instead of letting her becoming a nun. Of this moment, Colucci says ‘era quello l’inizio. Era quello il punto in cui ho cominciato a dire, “no, non mi voglio sposare, mi voglio fare suora”’ (Colucci, 2017). Both interviewees express strong physical and psychological discomfort with romance in their descriptions of the ‘zizzole dentro’ (Anonymous, 2017), and body language of physically pushing against romance with the words ‘lo evitavo proprio’ (Colucci, 2017). Sensual experience of religious calling is a common feature of conversion narratives, exemplified by Mary Ann and Van Reidhead’s study of a nun who recounted that ‘her senses confirmed that she belonged’ (Reidhead & Reidhead, 2003, p. 187); here, the senses serve to convey the opposite impression. As in the films of Chapter 5, romance in these interviews is another example of the ‘episodio di rottura’, common to conversion stories (Pannofino, 2012), from which women’s religious identities were born. Like in the films, secular romance is portrayed as limiting for women. These stories, and those who described their interaction with other nuns, speak of vocation as an alternative, more fulfilling love, which was chosen rather than foisted upon women.

This section has argued that oral histories evidence interviewees’ agency in choosing and pursuing their professions, yet this agency is consistently described as motivated by community or religion rather than ambition or independent choice. Their stories also echo conversion narratives; an established institutional narrative form. It is usual for women religious to be repeatedly interrogated about their vocations during their training, and it is possible that, because of this, vocation stories – like conversion stories – ‘[fanno] ricorso all’insieme preesistente di storie organizzative al fine di costruire e comunicare la propria storia personale’ (Referencing Linde, Pannofino, 2012, p. 5). The effect of using established narrative forms is that, ‘in tal modo riproducono la memoria collettiva’ (Pannofino, 2012, p. 5). Rather than create an individual autobiographical memory, women religious’ vocation stories both draw upon and

¹⁷⁹ The names of the men in this story have been changed, at the request of the interviewee, who asked to be anonymous.

reproduce Maurice Halbwach's description of how collective memory, 'creates shared versions of the past' (Erll & Young, 2011, p. 15).

Education

In this chapter it becomes evident that the careers offered to women religious were frequently far more varied and exotic than the average woman could expect at this time; the period which Willson describes as the 'era of the housewife' (Willson, 2010, p. 120). The first major difference to women's work that religious vows appear to make is a longer, more comprehensive education.¹⁸⁰ Nuns' access to education had long been on the Church's agenda, and Vatican II presented a key opportunity for concessions to be made in favour of women.¹⁸¹ As I listened to the interviewees, a clear system of progression emerged; women were accepted into orders as novices, and were then allotted training or education which would lead them into a professional field. There does not appear to have been much flexibility or choice in the pathways the women were given, nor did they necessarily fit with existing talents the novices may have had.¹⁸² Contrary to my expectations, many of the interviewees testified to having had little, and poor, education prior to religious profession. Some attributed this to the penury of their families, for example Sister Colomba remarks:

Siccome ero l'ultima di sette figli - eravamo contadini, gente povera – c'era mio fratello quello che mi precedeva da tre anni che aveva cominciato a studiare e quando ho finito le elementari io ho detto 'mamma, posso studiare?' Mamma ha detto 'se ci vai anche tu non riusciamo a tirare avanti tutti e due. Vai a lavorare, ci aiuti a pagare per il tuo fratello. Almeno uno andrà fino in fondo' (Colomba, 2017).

¹⁸⁰ Their role in education is one of the more developed areas of study regarding women religious. For a comprehensive historiography, see Raftery (2012).

¹⁸¹ Valerio observes, 'va anche evidenziata la nuova sensibilità che si andava affermando circa la necessità dello studio per le religiose' (Valerio, 2017, p. 187). Discussing one of the preparatory texts for Vatican II, Rocca affirms, 'il quarto [punto] riguardava la formazione delle religiose e la Sacra Congregazione dei Religiosi chiedeva che il concilio Vaticano II promuovesse la formazione di "giuniorati" o "scolastici" femminili, in maniera analoga a quanto si faceva con i seminari e gli scolastici maschili' (Rocca, 2013, p. 142).

¹⁸² Sister Zuzolo tells of how her profession was decided on the basis of her physique: 'Dicevano, "fatti una vocazione". E loro ci mandarono tutte in clinica, per far e un po' per vedere. Poi quelle che erano un po' più fiacchette mandarono a scuola. Io ero più robusta perché sono sempre stata un po' ciociottella - devi essere forte per lavorare. Allora sono andata lì, a lavorare, lavare per terra, fare da mangiare per i bambini' (Zuzolo, 2017). Another sister tells of how her expectations were also not met in this matter, saying 'mi piaceva tanto cucire, e ho detto "so ricamare, può darsi che mi mettano con le suore per ricamare, e poi mi manderanno per le comunità". Questo non è avvenuto, però è avvenuto qualcosa di più bello' (Colucci, 2017). Sometimes, novices were deliberately allocated an occupation which did not fit their skills. This was known as 'talent-stripping' (Campbell-Jones, 1979, p. 29).

Other interviewees noted the damage that war did to their educations.¹⁸³ One sister recalled, 'siccome ho cresciuto durante il periodo della guerra, c'erano solo le elementari' (Colucci, 2017). After her only teacher was killed in bombing in Foggia, she asserted 'io rifiutai di continuare alla quinta elementare' (Colucci, 2017). Religious institutions were a bulwark for wartime education, for students both within and outside of religious orders. Sister Pilotti explains that the only reason that she was able to go on studying at all during the war was because in the convent 'avevamo insegnanti religiosi nostre che già avevano preso la laurea' (Pilotti, 2017).

Religious orders emerge in these oral histories as the guardian angels of women's education, tallying with the findings of studies of nuns in different nations.¹⁸⁴ The 1951 census records that only a third of pupils registered in *scuole medie e superiori* were girls. At university numbers drop to just 60,000 women enrolled nationwide, in comparison to 167,000 men (Cinquantamila.it, 2014). Yet, women religious with the most basic of qualifications at entrance were provided with professional training courses, if not with access to higher education.¹⁸⁵ Many of the interviewees discussed education and training provided inside the convent. Perhaps the best example of the transformative education provided for women religious is Sister Colucci's story:

A quei tempi non è che le ragazze studiavano, facevano le elementari e basta [...] e poi con la guerra, era una cosa impossibile. Allora alcune non sapevano né leggere, né scrivere, neanche mettere una firma. [...] Mi ricordo nel postulantato soprattutto non sapevano che cosa farmi fare perché avevo solo la quarta elementare. Quindi dai diciannove anni fino ai trent'anni io in questi anni mi sono laureata in inglese. Con la quarta elementare ho cominciato a fare i studi, e poi quando arrivava settembre facevo l'esame, l'esame in prima media, seconda, terza media, dentro l'istituto perché avevamo le scuole e io potevo andare con le ragazze a fare l'esame interno. Poi quando sono arrivata alla terza media, saltando, studiando, c'era la magistrale. Allora mi hanno fatto fare pure la magistrale, e mi hanno fatto venire pure qui a Roma dove c'era un istituto per suore (Colucci, 2017).¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ This is factually correct: many schools were suspended or closed during World War Two because of bombings or lack of resources. Reflecting this, ISTAT was unable to record statistics on education during this period: 'La raccolta dei dati sommari, pubblicati annualmente nelle pagine dell'Annuario statistico italiano, fino al 1942-1943, [...] furono sospesi per l'aggravarsi del conflitto mondiale' (ISTAT, 2011, p. 6).

¹⁸⁴ Jane McDermid asserts that female religious orders were crucial to education in nineteenth-century Scotland (McDermid, 2009, p. 605).

¹⁸⁵ The Annuario Pontificio for 1948 records twenty-two universities worldwide and twelve *Istituti di studi superiori* in Rome under pontifical rule.

¹⁸⁶ Although this is a remarkable achievement of religious orders, we should be cautious. Colucci goes on to stipulate: 'Non sono una persona che ha mirato chissà che cosa come suora; tutte queste promozioni diciamo come suora le ho

These interviewees underline the increased educational and professional opportunities religious life offered women. If interviewees remember their educations so forthrightly, it may be testament to their unusualness both within communities, and in the wider secular context as we have seen in the case of both the *mondine* and *sarte*. It also stands in contrast to interviewees' own initial humble origins. Memories of enhanced education highlight the professionalisation of women religious' activity and their empowerment and distance from the traditional destinies of wife and mother.

One of the most remarkable and unusual features of women religious' educations regards their linguistic abilities. In the interviews themselves, I was often asked in which language I would prefer to speak.¹⁸⁷ Among the languages spoken by the sisters interviewed were: Italian, English, French, Urdu, Punjabi, Swahili, Mandarin, German, and Arabic. Most of these languages were learned either during overseas missions or with them in mind. The emphasis given to languages reflects the transnationalism which characterises most religious communities. Although interviewees often spoke of thorough linguistic training in recognised institutes, there are other accounts of sisters learning languages in rather improvised circumstances. Sister Colomba provides an amusing example of this:

Sono andata in Kenya prima, non sapevo né il francese, né l'inglese, perché in Italia ho fatto solo le medie, non si studiava niente. Poi pregando in francese, perché le altre novizie che venivano in Kenya erano francofone di diversi paesi, per cui i salmi li facevamo in francese. *L'Osservatore Romano* arrivava in inglese, ci confessavamo – se vuoi ridere – coi peccati già prescritti! Cercavamo di leggerli perché non sapevamo – ti dico, adesso ci fa ridere, però quella volta c'erano le suore missionarie di Africa che erano inglesi, che ci passavano una piccola schema, e noi sceglievamo lì i nostri peccati per dire alla confessione (Colomba, 2017).

These memories speak of a highly vocational education which challenged women by putting them into unfamiliar circumstances with only partial preparation. In comparison to the domestic, agricultural, or administrative jobs of most Italian working women (Willson, 2010, p. 118) we can notice a significant

avute proprio—non ho chiesto, perché ci sono tante mie consorelle che avrebbero voluto studiare e non hanno studiato [...] per esempio questa altra consorella che è entrata con me, lei si è fermata alla scuola materna. E il fratello, un dottore, ha scritto un biglietto alla superiora “come mai la mia sorella non l’ha fatto continuato a studiare?”. Invece no. I miei genitori non sapevano neanche che cosa studiavo, che alla fine ho preso la laurea in inglese!” (Colucci, 2017). It is true that religious institutions have historically provided education both for their own communities and also for non-Catholics and mission communities. However, it does appear that provision of education to sisters was patchy and sometimes seemingly random.

¹⁸⁷ At the *Piccole sorelle di Gesù* I was first greeted in French, the official language of the mother house.

difference. These accounts of education demonstrate the professional nature of women religious' training and testify to the 'regenerating' power of religious work.

Missions

Missions are present in most interviewees' accounts of their work. All but one interviewee had been on at least one mission, and exactly half of the interviewees had worked overseas. This section exposes the most prominent and interesting features recalled by interviewees of their missionary work. Most of the missionary sisters continued service work like nursing or teaching; however, this kind of work became exceptional because 'although women's work on the missions (teaching, nursing and so forth) tended to reflect their traditional role as nurturer, the life there was often imagined to be "topsy-turvy", perhaps even dangerous' and, as such, 'the missions may also have been regarded as providing a space in which gender roles in *this* life might be negotiated or reinterpreted' (McKenna, 2006a, p. 197). Destinations for missionary work among this group of subjects varied, although African countries featured strongly. The women often referred to their destination quite simply as 'Africa', for example, 'io sono stata trentacinque anni in Africa' (Zuzolo, 2017), and 'andare in Africa, andare in Inghilterra, era la stessa cosa' (Colomba, 2017), rather than specifying the particular country. This feature recalls some of the criticisms which have been made of colonialism and of missionary work – that developing countries are not understood in their individuality; portrayed as 'other', a homogenous area identifiable only by its poverty and lack of sophistication in comparison to the West (Hall, 2006). The problematising of missionary sisters' presence in developing countries, or lack of it, is a subject to which this section returns.

Missionary work was central to the identity of women religious in both lay and faith communities at this time. As McKenna observes, 'many of the women discussed their attraction to religious life in terms of [...] a fascination for missionary work. Indeed, going "on the missions" was what first attracted most of the women to religious life' (McKenna, 2006a, p. 196). The same can be observed of my group of interviewees. Sister Senes recalls:

Mia zia era—la sorella di mio papà, era già in missione. [...] Prima di partire, era dopo la guerra, è venuta per salutarci. [...] Io non dicevo niente, e la zia non mi ha chiesto niente, e sono stata zitta. Però, quando cominciavo ad avere quindici, sedici anni, ho cominciato a dire 'mamma, sai, io me la sento di farmi—', [mi rispose] 'eh, dove?', 'a farmi suora, suora'. Allora lì pensava, 'questa vuole andare in missione'. Poi alla fine ho detto: 'io voglio andare in missione' (Senes, 2017).

The reasons for feeling such an attraction to a missionary vocation are extrapolated by other sisters, and are articulated around the idea of giving one's service in places of need. For example, 'ho fatto i primi voti nel '65 e sono passata di qui, c'era bisogno di andare in Vietnam, e ho chiesto il Vietnam [...] c'era la guerra in Vietnam, c'era questa situazione difficile, e questo mi attirava, mi attirava (Berzuin, 2017). Sister Colomba's testimony echoes this sentiment:

Dopo che ho fatto i voti perpetui mi sono resa disponibile, perché ho visto che stando in fraternità, che tu stia in Africa, che tu stia in India, tutto il mondo è mio— [...] perché sceglierne uno? Non ho più scelto, ho scritto 'disponibile' (Colomba, 2017).

These statements recall missionary work as a calling to help, and paint a picture of absolute charity. Like the protagonist of *Anna* (1951), the interviewees discuss an attraction to the work of helping and being present at personal risk, rather than to exotic travel and adventure, the highest goals of missionary work. This ties in with post-World War Two discourse about models of ideal femininity being based upon 'un modello di persona ultracosciente sul lavoro, apostola fino all'eroismo [...] una donna votata all'eroismo e al sacrificio' (La Scuola, 1988, p. 290).

The work which the sisters performed was most commonly the provision of medical aid or education, and often the danger, barbarism, and violence encountered in these missions is highlighted. For instance, Sister Zuzolo remembers the civil war in Guinea-Bissau, saying:

C'erano i missionari, andavano raccogliendo i poveri; quelli malati, quelli morti. Le portavano a casa buttandoli in casa e li dovevo prendere i morti, i bambini, i vecchi, e dovevo fare il smischiamento [sic]. Qualche volta mi bagnavo le mani di sangue perché venivano dalla guerra, si sparavano, ammazzavano. Una guerra tribale. Questa è stata la cosa più orribile: che ammazzavano mamme e figli. E quindi notte e giorno ho fatto questo lavoro (Zuzolo, 2017).

Another sister recalls her experience of the 1965 revolution during her mission in the former Belgian Congo, saying, 'c'è stata la rivoluzione e quattro anni siamo rimaste in due in prigione. In prigione in casa nostra eh! Ci avevano rubato le macchine. La gente non veniva perché aveva paura. Non avevamo più niente' (Pilotti, 2017). The foregrounding of indigenous violence here alienates and differentiates these countries and inhabitants and recalls Stuart Hall's 'savage' type in representations of black people in Western culture, 'portrayed in terms of [...] savagery and barbarism' (Dines & Humez, 2002, p. 83). Western presence, in the form of women religious, is depicted as paternalistic, swooping in and 'resolving'

indigenous violence, supporting the comment that ‘portrayals help to construct the West as parental, caring, generous, kind, helpful’ (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1482), and Wendy Pojman’s observation that Italian women of this time ‘remained part of a privileged western European culture [...] that reinforced ideas of European superiority’ (Pojmann, 2013, p. 11). They also recall the ‘topsy-turvy’ world of the missions, where sisters foreground the danger of their lives. These narratives allow women to enter the traditionally male roles of hero, adventurer, but also that of the coloniser.

Accounts of the provision of services can be found in other interviews, and relate not to war zones but places deemed to be in particular need or poverty. Sister Colomba remembers working ‘in Cameroon in un policlinico’ and Sister Senes discusses how, ‘avevamo la casa nel deserto. C’era l’ambulatorio che avevamo. I malati venivano da noi. Venivano lì per farsi curare, gli davamo le medicine’ (Senes, 2017). Many sisters were qualified medical professionals, but even where they were not, they worked to provide medical supplies, such as Sister Berzuin, who told me:

Il lavoro era di lavare le bottiglie [ride]. Questo sì, era un po’ speciale. A quei tempi era così. Oggi non sarebbe più così. Ma a quei tempi si raccoglieva le bottiglie a Saigon, sai quelle di Coca ecc. e le raccoglievano in uno stagno così. [...] Un lavoro manuale. Per sei mesi. Dopo altri sei mesi sono andata in una fabbrica farmaceutica per bambini e semplicemente era molto meccanico: nella mattinata bisognava timbrare 800-1000 bottiglie così [imita il suono della timbra e ride] (Berzuin, 2017).

This recollection recognises that although perhaps not what we would expect of a nun – ‘questo sì, era un po’ speciale’ – women religious also performed unskilled labour in order to provide aid.

Many of the interviewees had run or worked in mission schools. One, Sister Fortuna, had even become a diplomatic courier for the Vatican:

Dopo trentotto anni che sono stata in Pakistan – perché io conosco l’inglese – [...] andai in Nigeria. In Nigeria dove si poteva entrare solo come diplomatico, e questo soltanto se conoscessi l’inglese. Noi avevamo l’ambasciata vaticana. E ci ho vissuto per due anni. [...] *È stato importante per la mia vita* perché da quell’ambasciata, mi mandarono con i messaggi nelle diverse parti del mondo. [...] Messaggi interni delle ambasciate. Molto, molto segreti messaggi, segreti, sicuri. [...] Di qua di là, centotto voli ho fatto [my emphasis] (Fortuna, 2017).

Again, the importance and transformative power of languages, and the exceptional opportunities for travel and status which women religious had, comes to the fore in discussions of missionary work.

It would, however, be wrong not to note the searing accounts of Western colonialism which have emerged in recent years, and the growing perspective that religious missionaries operated ‘as an arm of imperialism’ (Raftery, 2012, p. 43).¹⁸⁸ Especially in the light of burgeoning post-colonial theory, I was interested to see whether any of my interviewees would engage with this. Although none of the subjects explicitly referenced controversy or scandal, many of them highlighted the importance of harmonious relations with indigenous communities, stressing that religious imperialism was not the goal. Sister Abastanotti worked in Burundi as a nurse. She recalls:

Io sono stata molto aiutata dalle persone, perché anche con la difficoltà che avevo con la lingua, ho avuto bisogno di loro, e questo ci ha unito, [...] come rapporto di parità. Perché loro avevano bisogno di me come competenza medica, però io avevo bisogno di loro come competenza di lingue, quindi si è formato un bel legame fraterno tra di noi [...]. Anche perché ero lì in quel momento che fra gli Tutsi e gli Hutu. Ci sono stati degli scontri molto violenti. Quindi il mio personale in quel periodo lì erano tutti Hutu, e dopo c'erano i Tutsi, e si è formato un clima di fraternità, di 'si può lavorare insieme, si può vivere insieme'. Veramente per me è stata un'esperienza molto bella di fraternità. Mi ha arricchito, sì (Abastanotti, 2017).

The picture Abastanotti paints is one where missionaries, locals, and opposing factions are equal and work together for the greater good. She similarly remembers that when she was later working in Tunisia her Catholic community mixed peacefully with the Islamic community as ‘un’amicizia allargata’. Abastanotti highlights the potential for missionary work to create social links which overcome religious or political divide. Sister Fortuna, who directed a Catholic missionary school in Pakistan, repeats this theme, describing how she took over the school from two nuns who ‘avevano paura dei musulmani. E stavano un pochino nel loro angolino. E io invece aprivo le braccia ai musulmani. [...] Abbiamo lavorato proprio bene. [...] Mi sono trovata molto bene con la gente del luogo, con i musulmani’ (Fortuna, 2017). However, after this statement, she adds, ‘gli insegnanti musulmani si sentivano onorati di lavorare nella nostra scuola’ (Fortuna, 2017). Without wishing to evaluate the veracity of this statement, it nonetheless is revelatory of the power play at work in missionary communities. Sister Pilotti describes the special treatment her community was given in the Belgian Congo during its push for independence. Recalling the medical help which she provided in remote villages, she says:

¹⁸⁸ Works such as Ciro Poggiali’s *Diario AOI* (1936-37) detail the brutality of Italian colonialism, see Charles Burdett (2011). Missionaries’ involvement with colonial projects was often indirect; for example through establishing schools which taught in the coloniser’s language. For a discussion of the various involvements of religious in colonialism in a non-Italian context, see J. P. Daughton (2008), and the work edited by Dana L. Robert (2008).

Andavamo a piedi, per quattro o cinque volte, sei chilometri alle due. E ci hanno incontrato una volta dei soldati del governatore. 'Ma che vergogna mandare le suore a piedi!', e presto arriva un pulmino forte, un pulmino avevamo, l'autista pagato, gas che ci voleva, gratis! (Pilotti, 2017).

This anecdote, set in the context of political upheaval in the former Belgian Congo, reveals the problematic presence and unequal treatment of colonial subjects.

These unequal ethnic and power relations are something which only one interviewee acknowledges as problematic. In response to my question about how she found working with the local community, Sister Colomba replies:

Io di medicina tropicale non sapevo niente (ho fatto la scuola qui quindi è tutto un altro tipo di medicina). Erano loro [le persone del posto] che mi insegnavano, eppure avevano famiglie, figli, magari più mogli, con un salario minimo, ed erano molto meglio di me nel lavoro. Lì mi sono sentita io male, ma non me l'hanno mai fatto sentire loro. [...] Alle volte mi chiedevo 'ma io che diritto ho di prendere il salario più di uno di loro, che loro sono più di me?' (Colomba, 2017).

That missionary women religious received special status or treatment was often the case, and it is an interesting nuance of memory that this is barely evoked in the interviews. The frequency of references to harmonious relations with the local community does, however, point towards this being a tension of which interviewees are aware. Women workers are portrayed as providing a unique opportunity for mediation and bridge-building in the shadow of more violent and turbulent male military colonialism.

Missionary work was a point of enormous pride for the interviewees. Recollections concerning missionary work are overwhelmingly positive, and assert its value. Descriptions of the missions as, 'veramente una bellissima esperienza ho vissuto' (Abastanotti, 2017), are typical. Contact with other cultures and religions is remembered as having been a particularly valuable element of the work:

Mi ha molto maturato, sì. L'incontro con una cultura nuova, l'incontro con questo popolo, per me è stata una scuola di vita, in tutti i sensi, un'apertura di cultura, anche i valori [...] E allora lì *puoi comunicare, puoi avere il dialogo* [my emphasis] (Abastanotti, 2017).

Interviewees principally describe missionary work as an ideal context in which feminine skills like communication and empathy can thrive. McKenna posits the missions as spaces in which 'gender roles in

this life might be negotiated or reinterpreted' (McKenna, 2006a, p. 197). Oral histories recalling mission work certainly foreground the exceptional opportunities religious life give women, in ways which are fairly uncritically presented by the subjects themselves both in terms of gender and race relations. Yet, their professional work is recalled in terms of care and heroic sacrifice, and this mitigates its unique and innovative character from a gender perspective.

Pleasure & Pain; Emotional labour

Michael Hardt describes labour which is immaterial, such as care and service work, as affective, and notes how it is specifically feminine and corporeal (Hardt, 1999, p. 96). It is useful to note that women religious are doubly 'vulnerable' to undertaking affective work because it is not only a gendered norm, but also a religious one. Catholicism makes the performance and regulation of emotion one of its foundational principles.¹⁸⁹

It is not only the missionary sisters who expressed pleasure and satisfaction with their work. However, interviewees' accounts of pleasure in their work are often tempered or intertwined with descriptions of obedience. Mary Magray comments that, 'by the mid-nineteenth century, a new model of Catholic womanhood emerged which prized docility above most other qualities' (Magray, 1998, p. 130). Certainly in post-World War Two Italy this ideal was present in both religious and secular spheres. Catholic lay associations like the Gioventù Femminile proposed certain ideal forms of womanhood, highlighting self-sacrifice and dedication to family, Church, and the community (La Scuola, 1988, p. 290). Catholic discourse imagines an ideal of womanhood which ties together work, emotion, service, and sacrifice. I argue here that we can figure this discourse as a precursor to the contemporary theory of affective and emotional labour.

As we have already observed in Chapter 4, Arlie Hochschild's theory of emotional labour (1983) describes the 'effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions' (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 987). There is an evident crossover with affective work, and work in which emotions do not have to be produced but regulated, a common feature of oral histories of nuns. Hochschild distinguishes 'surface acting', where an emotion is displayed, but not felt, from 'active deep acting', 'when individuals try to influence what they feel in order to "become" the role they are asked to display' (Zapf, 2002, p. 244). Emotional work is gendered, since 'lacking other resources, women make a resource out of feeling' (Hochschild, 1983, p. 163). We can therefore expect that women religious engage in active deep – rather than surface – acting by reminding themselves of religious doctrine

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, the entreaty in Colossians (3:12) to 'put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering' (King James Version, 2011, p. 569).

and what it instructs God's servants to think and feel.¹⁹⁰ Oral histories position the work of women religious in this lexis of deep acting for emotional labour. As well as emotional labour being very much female-gendered, it is also renowned for going unrecognised as real work. The consequence of women religious describing their work in terms of emotional labour is that this has historically obscured its professional nature.

In some cases, interviewees describe their professional obedience and service as a continuation of what they experienced in the family space. Sister Pilotti describes her family as follows: 'c'era ubbidienza [...] come si viveva in famiglia—sempre quell'ubbidienza: papà era il papà, la mamma doveva essere aiutata. Da piccola avevo il mio servizio' (Pilotti, 2017). Here, description of family and convent space overlap. In response to the question of whether her vocation had changed her character, Sister Zimbaro said, 'certo. Diciamo che io ero ubbidiente' (Zimbaro, 2017). McKenna states, 'the most important model of womanhood outside marriage and motherhood was to be found in religious life. Certainly, it was the only other form of womanhood the Church publicly espoused, fitting in, as it did, with Catholic ideologies of female self-sacrifice' (McKenna, 2006a, pp. 193-94). Wider societal and institutional discourse around idealised femininity as self-denial can be seen to permeate these oral histories.

Obedience did not necessarily come easily; Sister Manzoni described how:

La vita religiosa, il modo di vivere ha influito sul mio carattere. Sì, ha influito. Mi ha modificata. [...] nell'accettare la volontà di Dio. Nell'accettare quello che era contrario alle mie vedute. Ecco, in quello mi ha modificato, però ci ha voluto del tempo (Manzoni, 2017).

Another sister describes missing out of her ambition: 'volevo andare in parrocchia ma non ho potuto andare [...] ho dovuto accettare, con la sofferenza, e purtroppo, accetti' (Liotti, 2017). Similarly, Sister Senes says 'se poi non mi piaceva una cosa, se non volevo mangiare una cosa non dicevo niente. Si deve abituare. Bisogna abituarsi a tante cose. Se no non riuscivi mai' (Senes, 2017). The dissonance between this 'ideal' femininity of sacrifice and self-effacement, and the lived reality for women was evoked by Sister Abastanotti, who tells of how she would hear others praise the convent, 'a dire "che bello" a una vita povera. [...] Sentivo dire "che bello", perché la fraternità ispirava simpatia alla gente di passaggio, io poi bollivo dentro [...] dobbiamo farci piccole, starci al nostro posto (Abastanotti, 2017). Another sister wept as she remembered how she was transferred from her community to another. She recalled how both the *priora* and the other sisters cried all day, before telling her "'Suor Loretta tocca a te" [...] I pianti che mi sono fatta, perché dovevo andare in questo posto che per me era molto brutto' (Jacopini, 2017). These oral histories consolidate the idea of religious work as necessitating deep-acting emotional labour and sacrifice,

¹⁹⁰ Hochschild (1983) uses the example of an air hostess thinking of a difficult passenger as a child, not responsible for its own behaviour, in order to active 'deep acting' which would allow them to feel the necessary emotions to deal with the passenger.

and suggest that this was not necessarily the gendered or God-given characteristic that Catholic discourse would suggest.

[See video 'Manzoni Obedience excerpt']

The necessity for obedience is sometimes recounted pragmatically, but also sometimes with explicit judgement and anger. We are left in no doubt that, occasionally, interviewees view obedience as a necessary evil, but an evil nonetheless. This is apparent again in a glimpse of one interview: 'ti fanno fare una cosa e tu non la vedi [la ragione], ecco. Perché è un conto parlare con una che se ti dice "fai così", e a te sembrava *stup*—che non andasse, allora l'ubbidienza costa' [my emphasis] (Manzoni, 2017). The half-utterance and then stifling of that word, *stupida*, tells of a judgement and resistance which is quashed both in reality and in testimony. While most interviewees reference obedience and sacrifice, some attribute it to established patterns, whereas others underline it as a learned – or forced – behaviour. All these comments describe emotional labour as an institutional lifestyle rather than a professional choice.

Similar to obedience is the forgetting, or burying, of the self, a feature of identity which was equally foregrounded. Statements such as 'tu devi, riesci a dimenticare te stessa' (Zuzolo, 2017), and 'difficile, difficile, sì. Ci sono sacrifici. Tanta abnegazione di noi stessi per aiutare gli altri' (Albini, 2017), evidence the importance of disregarding a sense of self. The notion of giving oneself to others and forgoing personal desires is also clear. For example, 'io non pensavo di me. Non ci pensavo [...] non mi sono mai rifiutata, mai pensata a me stessa' (Zuzolo, 2017). Indeed, when selfish pleasure is experienced, some recall this as a moral dilemma:

Io ogni fine di anno scolastico con tutti questi complimenti che mi facevano le mamme, 'brava mamma mia', chiedevo sempre perdono al Signore dopo l'anno scolastico. Chiedevo al Signore 'guarda ho lavorato per te, o ho lavorato per me?' [si commuove]. [...] ma non è che tu neanche li cercavi a volte [i complimenti] (Jacopini, 2017).

It should not be a surprise that obedience and abnegation take such an important place in women religious' accounts of the self. These declarations fit with statements discussed earlier about prioritising others care in work. The three vows which sisters take when entering the convent – poverty, chastity, obedience – evidently permeate their identity construction and ideals. The oral histories here support the idea of institutions instating acceptable versions of the self. Post-World War Two society and the Church was clear in its idealisation of so-called 'doti femminili: senso materno, senso della famiglia, spirito di donazione e di sacrificio' (La Scuola, 1988, p. 278). These 'gifts' are historical examples of emotional and affective labour, and permeate oral histories.

Narratives of emotion in work were not all negative, however. Responses to the question of whether interviewees had liked their work typically echoed Liotti's words, 'bello, bello, mi piaceva' (Liotti, 2017). As with the oral histories of seamstresses in this period, many women religious described their work as an act of love. In response to my comment that caring for the elderly must be a difficult job, Sister Albini replied, 'bisogna amore [sic]' (Albini, 2017).

[See video 'd'Annunzio Sores excerpt']

Similarly, when discussing her work as a nurse, Sister d'Annunzio states 'amavo i vecchietti [...] Io l'unica cosa dura che ho trovato sono le piaghe [...] mi hanno fatto compassione, insomma. [...] Non perché [mi fa schifo, ma], la compassione, la compassione. [...] Bisogna avere tanto amore. Tanto, tanto, tanto' (d'Annunzio, 2017). The performance of love and compassion (often conquering aversion) are gendered notions and, when a necessary part of a profession, recall women's making a professional resource of emotion (Hochschild, 1983, p. 163).

Similarly, there is a certain belief that to be truly good at one's job, 'bisogna essere portati' (Manzoni, 2017). Another sister commented, 'bisogna fare con passione. Penso che l'insegnante, si nasce. Perché non è un mestiere' (Zeppi, 2017). Observations of interviewees' professional roles are made such as, 'secondo me sono talenti, c'è gente che ha, c'è gente che non ha' (Albini, 2017), 'mi ha corrisposto proprio', and the superstitious notion that 'mi sono trovata nel mio segno' (Pappacena, 2017). The idea that destinies are predetermined is an extension of the faith of some Catholics, and this is significant because it may be argued to affect how interviewees describe their skills. However, given the similarities between these statements and similar ones from the *sarte*, it seems more likely that this kind of discussion of work is linked to gender discourse and the formation of ideal (working) femininity. For example, Sister Jacopini affirms of her work with children, 'io davo a loro un dono che il Signore mi aveva dato' (Jacopini, 2017). Another sister argues, 'sono cose naturali che vengono fuori. Non è che sono troppo istruita che ho fatto chissà che cosa di professionalità. No, no, è la persona proprio che ha queste esigenze dentro' (Pappacena, 2017). Competence and contentment at work are expressed as the result of finding an occupation that corresponds to a supposedly innate preference, rather than because of women's commitment or skill. The lexis used here again coheres with essentialist notions of women being born to care and service.

Loving and giving are expressed as central concepts to the professional work of women religious in these oral histories. Sister Liotti states, 'devi aiutare gli altri. Devi essere lì per aiutare gli altri. Questo qui, cioè il desiderio [...] di fare qualcosa, di essere d'aiuto. Sennò, perché ti fai suora, per fare che cosa?' (Liotti, 2017). The notion of giving oneself to those in pain is important to many of the interviewees. Sisters recount, 'mi è sempre piaciuto lavorare nella sofferenza [...] proprio mi sentivo realizzata perché lavoravo con un amore' (Zuzolo, 2017), reflecting again a giving of the self to one's profession. Describing her work with drug addicts, Sister Zeppi describes how, 'c'erano operatori, medici, che mi dicevano "ma Suor Paola, ma cosa sta lì a consumarsi dietro a questi?" [...] non bisogna scherzare. Ci vuole una fibra, perché sfibrano' (Zeppi, 2017). This very physical vocabulary reflects the bodily aspect of giving with which women religious

recount their work. As in the expression 'to give oneself body and soul', so do women religious recount the very physical experience of emotional labour.

Conclusion

These oral histories illustrate religious life as Valerio contends; offering unprecedented opportunities and self-realisation for women (Valerio, 2017, p. 186). Such a notion speaks to Bonifazio's idea of work regenerating and empowering the male citizen, proving that it is also applicable to women. However, women religious engage in a number of strategies which constitute an effort to cast their identities as collective, and their work as vocation or emotional labour. Women religious tie their identities and memories to collective spaces such as the family or community. They draw upon conversion narratives to fit their own personal stories into a wider canon of religious experience. They omit critical reflection on themselves as gendered subjects. I argue that the reasons for this are institutional, social, and political. My argument is supported by Mangion, who observes the unlikelihood of women religious self-identifying as professionals because of the secular overtones of such an identity (Mangion, 2005, p. 234). We should also recall the position of the Catholic Church which saw in the demands of contemporary feminist movements the 'frantumarsi [dei] capisaldi della famiglia e della società' (Valerio, 2017, p. 176). It was impossible for Catholicism – and by that merit women religious themselves – to describe female workers as emancipated or independent. Consequently, the unique and innovative labour performed by nuns is widely unnoticed and unproblematised by women religious themselves in oral histories and more widely by secular society. Their labour is considered instead as part of a larger story of Catholic – and female – charity.

Afterword

Did work empower and regenerate the female citizen in post-World War Two Italy? This is one of the central questions that this thesis has sought to address. Over the six chapters, I have examined filmic representations of working women, and put these into dialogue with oral histories, asking how work is embedded in, and interacts with, gender norms and historical context. This thesis began by setting out three key areas from which the Italian working woman is absent in the postwar period: filmic representations, oral histories, and scholarly enquiry. To redress these absences, I found and analysed eight films featuring female working protagonists which span a range of years, directors, and genres. I also collected and conducted original oral history interviews with women who worked between 1945 and 1965. The very act of uncovering and examining these sources is political, and creatively responds to oral history's aspiration to give voice to the silent. I have demonstrated the interaction between cultural representations and individual and collective memories of working women, observing how both oral and filmic sources reference, build upon, and reject dominant discourses. I selected this period between 1945 and 1965 because it is so significant in terms of women's work; where they were occupying increasingly visible roles, but were subject to discourse encouraging them back to traditional roles and spaces. My study is important because it responds to the absence of the working woman, because it critiques her representation where she appears, because it helps us to understand the role she played in postwar society, and because its branches reach towards wider enquiry of how society reacts to and values women's work.

One central argument throughout the thesis regards the interaction between cultural materials, collective memory, and individual identity. My choice of film as a medium was crucial here; as the most popular leisure pursuit of this time (Sorlin, 1996, p. 74), cinema spoke to and of postwar Italy. Film was a cultural medium and a collective experience. A point arising from the analysis contained in Chapter 2 on the *mondine* demonstrates this phenomenon. A *mondina* recalls her experience of watching the film *Riso amaro* (De Santis, 1949), saying:

C'è una scena in cui le ragazze scavalcano un muro per andare fuori la sera, allora uno che avevo dietro di me ha detto: 'tanto è vero perché erano tutte puttane'. Mi sono alzata in piedi, l'ho preso così e ho detto: 'se ridici quella parola ti porto dai carabinieri e ti faccio arrestare! Ignorante! Tu che non hai mai avuto neanche una gatta che ti corresse dietro!' (*Sorriso amaro*, 2003).

Not only does this episode underline the interactivity of my sources, it also shows what is at stake in portrayals of working women, and the depth of feeling of those protagonists that these portrayals claim to represent.

One of the arteries of this thesis has been the symbolic connection between women's work and the nation. In the first section addressing the *mondine*, I demonstrated the influence of films' political contexts on their portrayals of working women. The turmoil between the political Left and Right in postwar Italy plays out in the depiction of the *mondine* in *Riso amaro* (De Santis, 1949) but is absent from the later *La risaia* (Matarazzo, 1956), mirroring postwar Italy's move from political upheaval in 1949 to 'ideological complacency' in 1956 (Marcus, 2000, p. 339). This reading connects with and enriches the analysis of other scholars who have pointed to women's political and national symbolism in postwar Italian film, such as Danielle Hipkins, Mary Wood, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, and Millicent Marcus.¹⁹¹ The section also reflected on Nira Yuval-Davis' claim that women represent the collectivity and linked this to the primacy given to the concept of *solidarismo* in postwar political discourse (Ginsborg, 1990, p. 153). Notions of solidarity and collectivity were drawn out both from the films of Chapter 1 and the oral histories of Chapter 2, and tied in with traditional ideas of women as maternal carriers of nation. Although this section highlighted the privileged cultural space accorded to the *mondine*, it suggested that cultural memory of the *mondine* has instrumentalised them for their political symbolism and thus diminished their identity as workers. The case of Maria Margotti, evoked in Chapter 2, brings this argument into focus by highlighting how her memory was exploited by the Left; sometimes to the detriment of historical accuracy and the wellbeing of her surviving relatives.

The theme of social change being expressed through representations and oral histories of working women emerged again in the second section on *sarte*. Seamstresses provide an interesting counterpoint to the *mondine* because their work has associations with traditional female employment. This thesis has consistently engaged with the historical sexual division of labour, looking at how women in feminised sectors related differently to their employment. In Chapter 3 I observed how the films *Sorelle Materassi* (Poggioli, 1943), *Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna* (Emmer, 1952), and *Le amiche* (Antonioni, 1955) show seamstresses occupying urban spaces, often with disastrous consequences. By considering the theories of feminist geographers such as Gillian Rose (1993), Doreen Massey (1994), and Elizabeth Wilson (1991), I argued that the urban space is shown as fraught with danger, an outlook which expresses postwar attitudes to women's work more generally. In oral histories with *sarte* discussed in Chapter 4, space was again evoked as fundamental to women's identities. Whether through the modern structure of the *sartoria* or the increased social mobility of the *sarte*, interviewees narrate how their work allowed them to occupy new and potentially transgressive spaces. I contended that it is the feminised nature of seamstresses' work which allows them to enter such spaces without gaining renown as transgressive subjects.

Women religious, like seamstresses, inhabit an ambiguous territory between emancipated and traditional femininity. The final section on women religious underlined the inherently patriarchal context of the Church (Valerio, 2017, p. 174), but set this in counterpoint with the opportunities which religious life affords to women. Finding continuity with Chapter 3, Chapter 5 contended that filmic portrayals of women

¹⁹¹ See Hipkins (2006a) (2006b) (2007) (2014) (2016); Wood (2005 (2006); Ben-Ghiat (1999); and Marcus (2000).

religious allowed new gender behaviours to be rehearsed and considered the role that genre plays in this. Melodrama, like pink neorealism and comedy, presents female professionals in new and transgressive professional roles but guards the possibility of returning them to reassuring structures like marriage, the domestic sphere, or the convent. The very real and unique opportunities bestowed on women religious are thrown into relief by the oral histories in Chapter 6. Bringing us back to the question of whether work empowered and regenerated the female citizen, interviewees testify to enhanced education, varied and satisfying careers, and the opportunity for self-determination. Yet, as in Chapter 4 on seamstresses, the career narratives of nuns reveal narratorial and linguistic features which gender their work. Interviewees deploy narrative strategies which link their professional choices to familial influence, and describe their success in affective terms of love, passion, and care.

Drawing together the various threads of this thesis is my contention that work was, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the sector, traditionally considered to be unfeminine. In order to be made visible, it is therefore feminised in film and oral history in a number of ways. These include sexualising women, making them symbolic of the collective, or rendering their work essentially emotional. This reflects the failings and urgent importance of scholarly enquiry into women's work; we need to recognise their activity as work before we can value and inscribe women into (labour) history.

This thesis is not a conclusion, but a beginning, to enquiry into cultural representations and memory of women's work. It is also one of the few nascent projects which bring filmic representations, oral histories, and archival material into contact. In the course of this thesis I have sought out other scholars who conduct oral histories with women workers and have found a majority of researchers looking at contemporary case studies.¹⁹² This is perhaps unsurprising because contemporary working women are both more numerous and more accessible. Yet, this is the very reason for the urgency of interviewing women who worked in the past. All of the sectors investigated in this thesis are disappearing; the *mondine* ceased to exist in the early 1960s, the *sartoria su misura* has been almost obliterated by ready-to-wear fashion, and secularisation has reduced the number of women religious world-wide by almost 25 per cent over twenty years.¹⁹³ To understand how women's work is valued today, it is crucial to critically assess its cultural and collective memory.

Inevitably, this study has opened up paths of enquiry without being able to travel to their conclusions. This project selects women's work sectors which are portrayed in film, present the possibility of interviewing workers, and constitute an original area of research. This multidimensional brief meant that some paths of enquiry fell by the wayside. Sectors like factory work, shop work, office work, dancing, political work, and teaching, would constitute fascinating extensions of my research on women's work in postwar Italy. However, it was often the case that an area of work which featured in film would not have

¹⁹² See sociologist Asiya Islam's doctoral research on women's work in urban India, for example: (Islam, 2016). This fact is also evidenced by the contents of the academic journal *Gender, Work, and Organisation*.

¹⁹³ This is based on statistics given by Giancarlo Rocca (2013, p. 152) for the years between 1990 and 2010.

presented an easily reachable group of interviewees. Office workers, for example, feature in a number of comedies, like *L'impiegato* (Puccini, 1960) which stars Eleonora Rossi-Drago as a high-ranking civil servant who comes in to overhaul an inefficient male-dominated public administration. Yet, given financial and time restraints, it was not possible to assemble a sufficient body of interview subjects who had worked in offices. There are, therefore, a number of meaningful projects to be undertaken in the area of women's work in post-World War Two Italy but which would have to narrow their focus to either filmic or oral history sources.

The sector which perhaps most captured my academic interest was that of postwar women religious. As previously mentioned, their ambiguous status as professionals, as well as the proliferating academic and popular interest in their contributions, makes them ripe figures for the further study.¹⁹⁴ There is also particular appeal in the transnational nature of the work of women religious. As Chapter 6 highlighted, their work crosses geographical and linguistic expanses. They are also interesting figures in terms of how they reflect social change; despite being inhabitants of a transnational institution, they also come from, and go out into, local and national communities. For these reasons, their oral histories are rich sources for the study of religious, institutional, and national change. Research into how women religious have responded to contemporary institutional and social change would undoubtedly be fascinating. Specifically, I plan to conduct a transnational oral history study into how women religious responded to the changes resulting from Vatican II.

There are also meaningful transnational and interdisciplinary offshoots to be made from this thesis' enquiry into women and work. This was evidenced by a paper that I gave at the University of Warwick Centre for the Study of Women and Gender in the department of Sociology. In tandem with my own paper on the labour of nuns, sociologist Asiya Islam presented her oral histories with Indian women working in the service sector. She highlighted how Arlie Hochschild's concept of the 'time bind' (Hochschild, 1997), where women blur home and work environments in their narratives of work, was relevant to both our research. This crossover highlights just one of the ways in which a transnational and interdisciplinary project on women's work would present a fascinating and original contribution.

This thesis has contributed original analysis, new voices, innovative methodological approaches, and promising future pathways in the cultural study of women's work. Setting out with the intention to recognise women in postwar Italy's labour landscape, it has drawn attention to critical and representational absences, and critiqued cultural and collective memories which come to constitute the identities of working women. As a final reflection, I wish to underline the personal and political value of this thesis. This research allowed me to meet and exchange with subjects who were at the early stages of what subsequently became women's mass entry into the workforce. It enriched my own understanding of the role of work in

¹⁹⁴ For a fuller discussion of the interest of studying contemporary women religious, see my forthcoming article (Derounian, 2018b).

gender relations and social power, and, as such, is of ongoing relevance both in Italy and beyond.

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Filmography

Mondine

Di madre in figlia. 2008. [Documentary] Directed by Andrea Zambelli.

Il maggio delle mondine. 2011. [Documentary] Directed by Francesco Marano.

La risaia. 1956. [Film] Directed by Raffaello Matarazzo.

Riso amaro. 1949. [Film] Directed by Giuseppe De Santis.

Sorriso amaro. 2003. [Documentary] Directed by Matteo Bellizzi.

Sarte

Le amiche. 1955. [Film] Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni.

Le ragazze di piazza di Spagna. 1952. [Film] Directed by Alberto Lattuada.

Sorelle Materassi. 1943. [Film] Directed by Fernando De Poggioli.

Religiose

Anna. 1951. [Film] Directed by Alberto Lattuada.

La Novice/Lettere di una novizia. 1960. [Film] Directed by Alberto Lattuada.

Suor Letizia. 1956. [Film] Directed by Mario Camerini.

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Cercasi bionda bella presenza. 1942. [Film] Directed by Pina Renzi.

Cielo sulla palude. 1949. [Film] Directed by Augusto Genina.

Domenica d'Agosto. 1950. [Film] Directed by Luciano Emmer.

Due lettere anonime. 1945. [Film] Directed by Mario Camerini.

Fiamme sulla laguna. 1949. [Film] Directed by Giuseppe Maria Scotese.

Giovanna d'Arco al rogo. 1954. [Film] Directed by Roberto Rossellini.

I bambini ci amano. 1954. [Film] Directed by Enzo Della Santa.

I figli non si vendono. 1952. [Film] Directed by Mario Bonnard.

Il lupo della sila. 1949. [Film] Directed by Vittorio De Sica.

Il suo più grande amore. 1956. [Film] Directed by Antonio Leonviola.

Io, Caterina. 1957. [Film] Directed by Oreste Palella.

L'angelo bianco. 1955. [Film] Directed by Raffaello Mattarazzo.

La ciociara. 1960. [Film] Directed by Vittorio De Sica.

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La maestrina. 1942. [Film] Directed by Giorgio Bianchi.

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Ladri di biciclette. 1948. [Film] Directed by Vittorio De Sica.

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L'impiegato. 1960. [Film] Directed by Gianni Puccini.

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Malacarne. 1946. [Film] Directed by Pino Mercanti.

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Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi. 1950. [Film] Directed by Giuseppe De Santis.

Siamo donne (Quattro attrici, una speranza - primo episodio). 1953. [Film] Directed by Alfredo Guarini.

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